PlayStation 3 | PlayStation Portable | PlayStation Network | PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

JULY 09

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 21 (July 2009)

GOD of WAR III

Tons of new details, items, combat moves revealed!

HOT EXCLUSIVES!

HEAVY RAIN

On the trail of PS3's serial killer app

GHOSTBUSTERS

Dan Ackroyd + Harold Ramis:
On the game *and* the next movie!

GET A JOB AT A GAME STUDIO!

13 studios reveal PlayStation's next wave and how you can be part of it

SQUARE ENIX REVEALS
SECRET NEW GAME

Try and take me punk!

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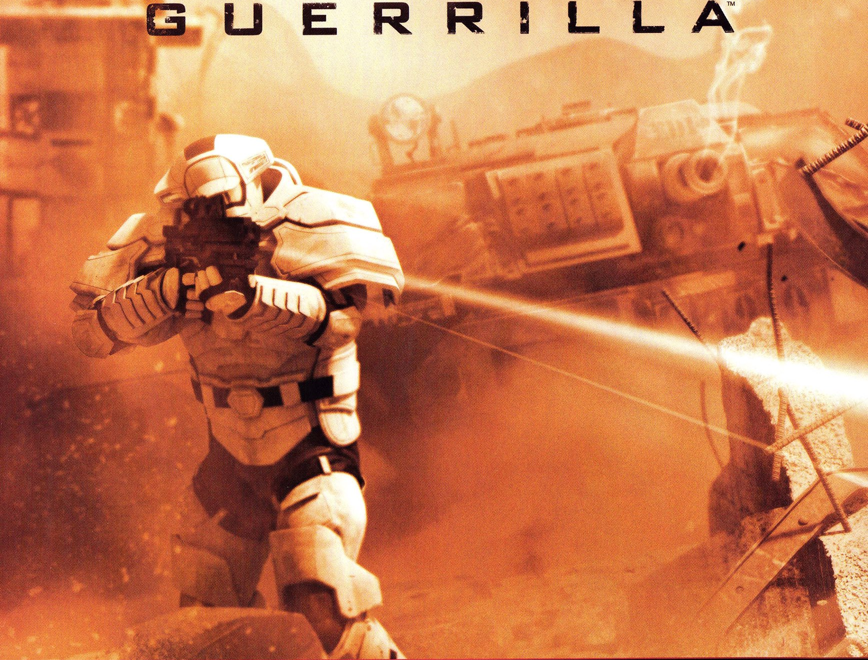

MATURE 17+
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Strong Language
Violence

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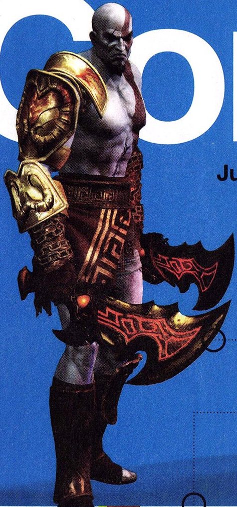

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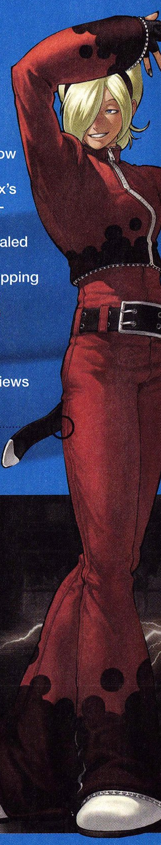
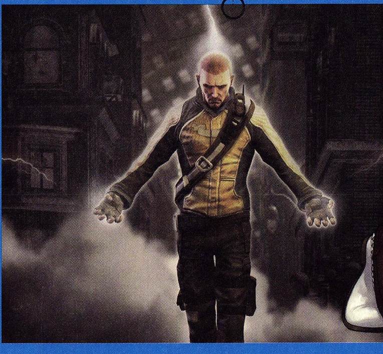


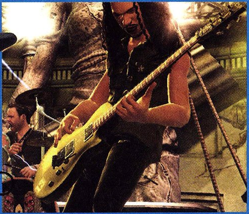
PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION THE DEVELOPERS [PART ONE]

INSOMNIAC GAMES



"Fer Pete's sake, honey! Sure they're cute when they're still puppies, but then they start growin'..."

A word of advice: Never make fun of country music to a man in a cowboy hat.



"It's weird, you play *Guitar Hero* too much and then it's like, whoa...where'd the buttons go?"

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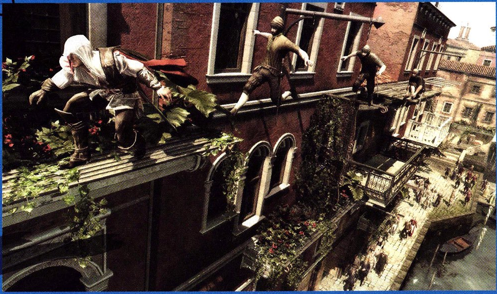
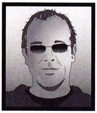
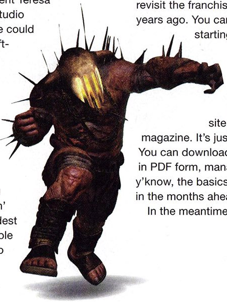




Editor's Note

"What if courage and imagination became everyday mortal qualities?"

Google Steve Ballmer and developers. If you haven't seen it already you'll find a bizarre video of the Microsoft CEO sweating as only a big executive can, clapping out a mantra that it's all about developers. Developers, developers, developers. Though Ballmer was referring to the cadre of Microsoft platform and application dev teams, his overtly bombastic sentiment is relevant to the games industry today: without game developers crafting unique experiences within the framework of their office cultures, we wouldn't be getting quite so excited about the games coming to PS3 and PSN in the months ahead. How unique? Quirky? Dedicated? I think you'll get a real kick of peeking behind the curtain at some of the teams bringing PlayStation's next next-generation of games. We've got insight into their PS3 experience, plans ahead, and the company culture in which these games are created from 13 studios, and we'll showcase more next month.



In the same spirit, we sent Teresa to Sony's Santa Monica studio to eke out every detail she could muster from the team crafting PlayStation 3's most anticipated game still in development. *God of War III* deserves all the hype that will surround its development and eventual release (and we're cognisant of our roll in stoking that hype machine, but what do you expect? It's *God of* freakin' *War!)* Teresa tried her hardest to get every nugget possible from a team determined to ensure that we'll be as surprised (and delighted) by events as you are when we finally get to play the finished game.

> "Without game developers crafting unique experiences within the framework of their office cultures, we wouldn't be getting quite so excited about the games."

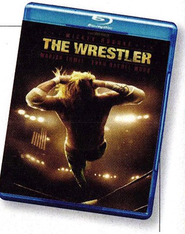
We also couldn't resist the opportunity to talk to Dan Ackroyd and Harold Ramis, creators of the legend that is *Ghostbusters* on their collaboration with the developers at Terminal Reality. Scott fought off being star struck to chat up the stars about their contribution to the process, and what it means to revisit the franchise that launched some 25 years ago. You can see what they have to say starting on page 62.

Lastly, what's that? Is that a…web site? If you point a browser to www.playstationthemagazine.com you'll see a real web site proudly showcasing our magazine. It's just a start…but it *is* a start! You can download a couple of sample pages in PDF form, manage your subscription, y'know, the basics. We'll have more updates in the months ahead!

In the meantime, enjoy the issue…

Rob

"Quote" contest



Lucky old Eugene Sytnyk of Wallingon, NJ who identified last month's movie quote from *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children.* He'll be receiving a random Blu-ray movie for taking the time to enter the contest and getting remarkably lucky in being randomly selected by my cat stepping on the keyboard as I scrolled through the entries. You can be that lucky, too. Yes, you. Just identify the movie that's quoted at the top of this page, send your entry to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with the subject line of Ed Note July (and include your full mailing address), and cross your fingers, or whatever it is you do to invoke lady luck.

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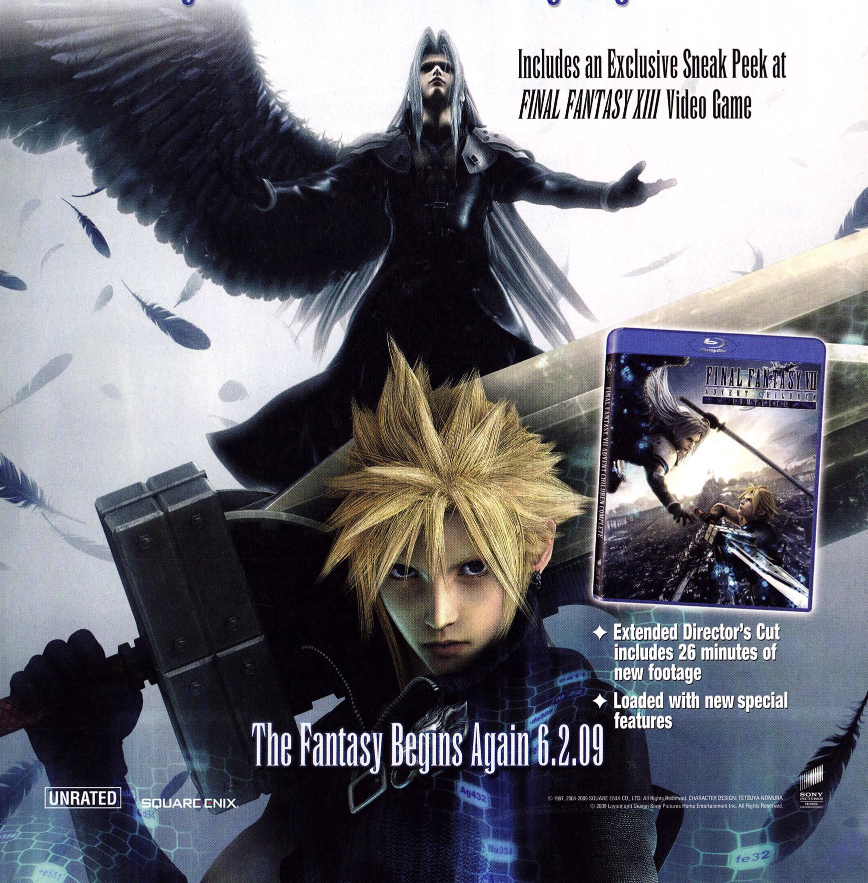
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The Fantasy Begins Again 6.2.09

UNRATED

SQUARE ENIX

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SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

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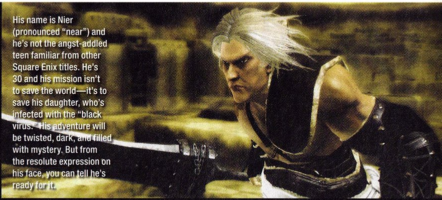


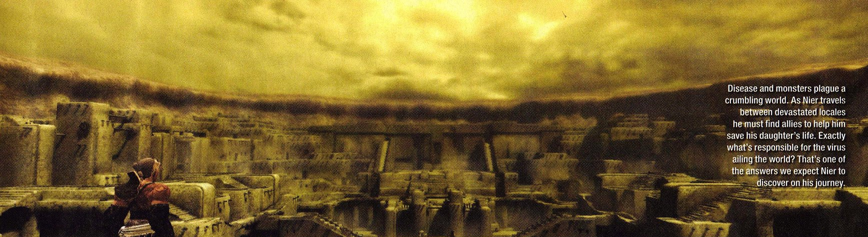
His name is Nier (pronounced "near") and he's not the angst-addled teen familiar from other Square Enix titles. He's 30 and his mission isn't to save the world—it's to save his daughter, who's infected with the "black virus." His adventure will be twisted, dark, and filled with mystery. But from the resolute expression on his face, you can tell he's ready for it.

NIER-LY THERE...

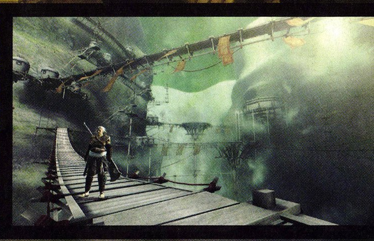
1

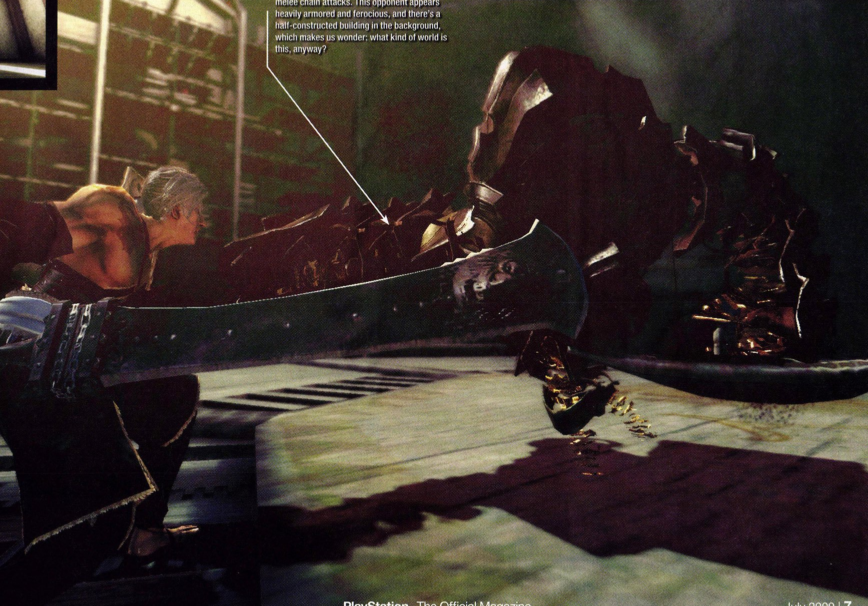
The latest scoop on *Square Enix's* dark new franchise

Visually, Square Enix's upcoming action-adventure title, *Nier,* is stunning. Pretty, you could even say. But we've finally squeezed info out of the publisher: set for a 2010 release, the themes it explores are *not* pretty. They're dark. Deadly dark. An illness—called the "black virus"—is ravaging a degenerating world. Anguish, suffering, and despair skulk in every shadow. How the world sunk to this position is unknown, but one man is rebelling against it, for purely selfish reasons.



Disease and monsters plague a crumbling world. As Nier travels between devastated locales he must find allies to help him save his daughter's life. Exactly what's responsible for the virus ailing the world? That's one of the answers we expect Nier to discover on his journey.



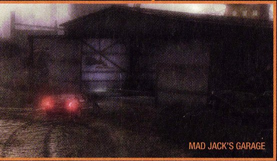


Combat will be a mix of magical abilities and melee chain attacks. This opponent appears heavily armored and ferocious, and there's a half-constructed building in the background, which makes us wonder: what kind of world is this, anyway?

2 TRIGGERING EMOTIONS

What kind of pansy game *wants* to evoke feelings of "empathy, sadness, and love"? That's *Heavy Rain's* claim to standout status on the PlayStaion 3, and it ain't for the weak-stomached

A. The Setting



MAD JACK'S GARAGE

B. The Characters

NAME: "Mad Jack"

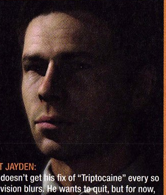
JOB: Stolen car dealer

CREDENTIALS: Keeps his mouth shut; not afraid to take out pests who ask too many questions

HISTORY: Sold a blue Chevrolet to the Origami Killer

PERSONALITY: Mean

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MAD JACK:
1. He "forgets" names.
2. He doesn't like cops.



NAME: Norman Jayden

JOB: FBI profiler

AGE: 29

CREDENTIALS: Degree in Psychology and Forensics

HISTORY: Spent the last three years chatting up serial killers in jail, trying to understand how they think and behave.

PERSONALITY: Organized, methodical

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT JAYDEN:

1. He's a drug addict. If he doesn't get his fix of "Triptocaine" every so often, his nose bleeds and vision blurs. He wants to quit, but for now, his little problem is his big secret. (Narcotics and the FBI don't mix.)

2. He's one of four characters that you'll control in *Heavy Rain*. The four don't know each other, but they'll offer different perspectives on the search for the Origami Killer. Characters swap as you change scenes. Their histories and personalities are unique.

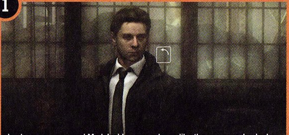
A serial killer is on the loose. The local press of an unspecified U.S. east coast city have dubbed him the "Origami Killer" because he leaves a piece of origami in his victims' hands, and the local police don't have a clue who he is. And it's raining. A lot. One of the most striking games currently in development on *any* platform is exclusive to PS3. This is *Heavy Rain.*

Here's the deal: *Heavy Rain* is not a shooter, not a beat-'em-up, not a brawler. It's more like an adventure game or even an interactive thriller TV show. You walk. You talk. You interact with the environment (via an unusual and intriguing control system). You fight, but not with a pre-set list of jabs and kicks—all fights are unique quick-time events, choreographed yet flexible (the game won't "reload" if you fail, it'll branch off into a different path instead). You think, draw conclusions, and then act upon them. You develop an emotional connection with the characters. And (we're guessing), eventually you find the killer, lock him up, and call it a day—but at a cost. After all, the game's motto is "How far would you go to save someone you love?"

At an event in Los Angeles, *Heavy Rain* writer and director David Cage revealed the first-ever in-game, well, "interactive footage" isn't the right phrase, but that's how it looked (and felt, in our hands-on replay). The scene's called "Mad Jack," and it takes place about halfway through the game. Norman Jayden, an FBI profiler, is questioning Mad Jack about the Origami Killer...

C. The Story

1



Jayden snoops around Mad Jack's garage. Icons like the one near Jayden's shoulder pop up around objects with which Jayden can interact. This one activates Jayden's Added Reality Interface (ARI), a tool developed by the Pentagon and given to the FBI to aid agents at crime scenes.

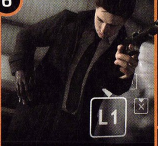
5

Eventually, Jayden corners Mad Jack.

At this point, he can pick how he wants to "persuade" Jack to talk by tapping on the face button associated with a thought. These "thoughts" can be activated at any time by pressing L2 (though in less dramatic situations they simply reveal Jayden's musings at that particular moment). The speed they float around Jayden depends on Jayden's state of mind. When he's nervous, they'll be swimming so fast around the screen that you'll have a hard time reading them.

In this case, "second chance" is the good cop choice, "persist" shoots a threatening bullet behind Mad Jack's head, and "gasoline" causes Jayden to blabber like a madman about blowing the whole joint (and the two of them) up in flames. Being sane, Mad Jack talks.

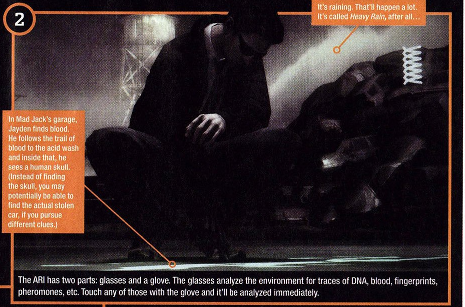
6



In the middle of their chat, Jayden's addiction kicks in. He needs his Triptocaine…that means *you* need to press and *hold* the buttons that appear. You'll fail. Mad Jack will knock you unconscious, and…

7

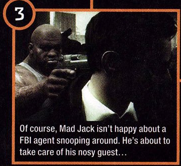
You'll wake up handcuffed in a car that's about to be crushed. In a timed event, you'll have to find a way out (again, using contextual commands). You might turn on the radio (useless), strain pointlessly to break your handcuffs (don't waste time!), or find the gun you've hidden in the glove compartment (yes). You have to learn which commands are near which objects to figure out what they do. (Yes, some guesswork is involved.)



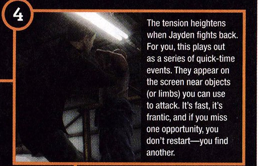
It's raining. That'll happen a lot. It's called *Heavy Rain,* after all…

In Mad Jack's garage, Jayden finds blood. He follows the trail of blood to the acid wash and inside that, he sees a human skull. (Instead of finding the skull, you may potentially be able to find the actual stolen car, if you pursue different clues.)

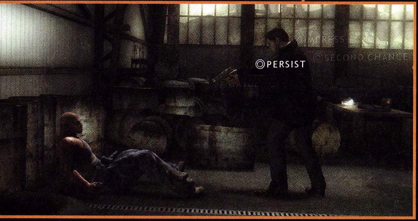
The ARI has two parts: glasses and a glove. The glasses analyze the environment for traces of DNA, blood, fingerprints, pheromones, etc. Touch any of those with the glove and it'll be analyzed immediately.

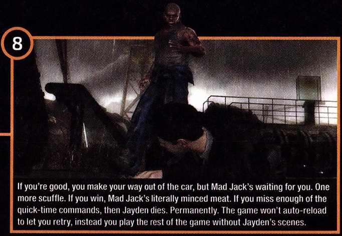


Of course, Mad Jack isn't happy about a FBI agent snooping around. He's about to take care of his nosy guest…

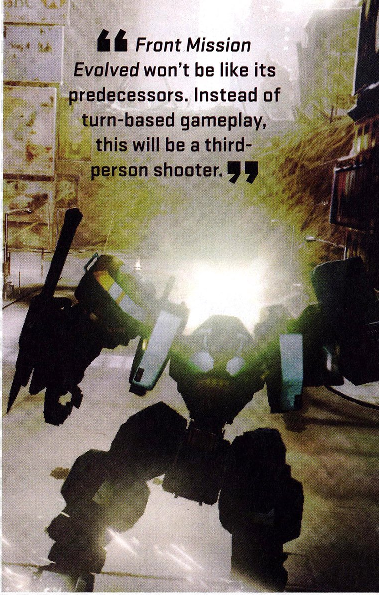


The tension heightens when Jayden fights back. For you, this plays out as a series of quick-time events. They appear on the screen near objects (or limbs) you can use to attack. It's fast, it's frantic, and if you miss one opportunity, you don't restart—you find another.





If you're good, you make your way out of the car, but Mad Jack's waiting for you. One more scuffle. If you win, Mad Jack's literally minced meat. If you miss enough of the quick-time commands, then Jayden dies. Permanently. The game won't auto-reload to let you retry, instead you play the rest of the game without Jayden's scenes.



> “*Front Mission Evolved* won't be like its predecessors. Instead of turn-based gameplay, this will be a third-person shooter.”

3 MISSION STATEMENT

Another new Square Enix game evolves

Oh boy, oh boy! Wanzers (otherwise known as “mecha,” or giant, walking robots) on a PS3, with those crisp, sharp hi-def graphics? Oh boy! But ***Front Mission Evolved*** won't be like its predecessors. Instead of tactical turn-based gameplay, this will be a third-person shooter. You'll play as young engineer Dylan Ramsey, who gets dragged into war after a terrorist attack on Manhattan, and you'll be able to tweak and customize your very own Wanzer (yes, you control the giant, walking…and shooting… robot, *oh boy).* As if that weren't enough, you can bring your fully decked out Wanzer to compete online. Oh! Boy! So it won't be a traditional *Front Mission* game, but robots. Big robots. Customizable. HD graphics. Online. Battle! (Can you tell we're psyched by the potential?)

4 SUMMER SHOWDOWN

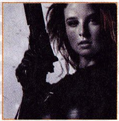
PTOM braves the gauntlet of summer movie blockbusters and their obligatory licensed games so you don't have to! Which are the ones you must watch and play?

MOVIES

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

Opens: June 24
Studio: Paramount Pictures

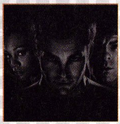
The follow up to Michael Bay's 2007 mega-hit promises bigger and better 'bot-on-'bot action. Yeah, that kind of nerd pr0n gets us hot. Shia LaBeouf returns as the obligatory human lead, but that won't keep us from watching it.



G.I. JOE: The Rise of Cobra

Opens: August 7
Studio: Paramount Pictures

The elite G.I. JOE team faces off against the mysterious Cobra organization utilizing the latest in hi-tech military and spy gear. The trailer has us intrigued, but there's no way this could possibly be good, is there?



Star Trek

Out now
Studio: Paramount Pictures

By the time you read this, you'll know whether this was the best or worst idea ever. But J.J. Abrams' take on the maiden voyage of Enterprise and the young guns version of the classic series' crew? Beam us up, Scottie.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Opens: July 15
Studio: Warner Bros. Ent.

Potter versus Valdemort—the darker the series gets, the better it gets, and Hermione's legal now (isn't she?), so we don't have to feel guilty about scopin' her. Added bonus: making fun of the people who show up to watch in cosplay.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

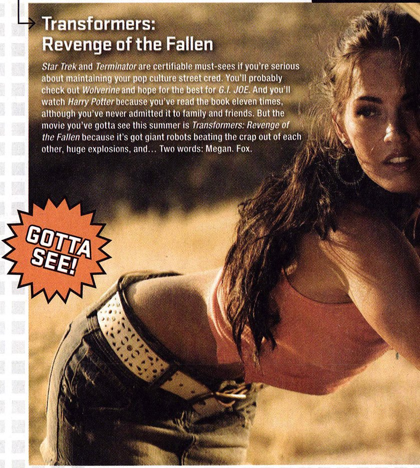
Out now
Studio: 20th Century Fox

X-Men movies are always solid fare, and Hugh Jackman's presence makes it an easy sell to the GF or missus. Plus, we find out why Wolverine's so PO'ed all the time. And does anyone else think Gambit's got the lamest super power ever?

Terminator Salvation

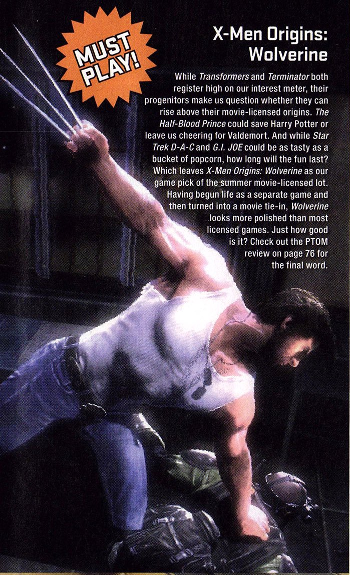
Out now
Studio: Sony Pictures

Batman sans cape? Christian Bale stars as John Connor, the man fated to save the human race from machine-induced extinction. The human-on-'bot action distracts us from the headache-inducing time anomaly conundrums.



Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

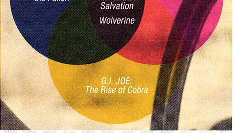
Star Trek and *Terminator* are certifiable must-sees if you're serious about maintaining your pop culture street cred. You'll probably check out *Wolverine* and hope for the best for *G.I. JOE*. And you'll watch *Harry Potter* because you've read the book eleven times, although you've never admitted it to family and friends. But the movie you've gotta see this summer is *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* because it's got giant robots beating the crap out of each other, huge explosions, and... Two words: Megan. Fox.

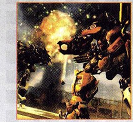


MUST PLAY!

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

While *Transformers* and *Terminator* both register high on our interest meter, their progenitors make us question whether they can rise above their movie-licensed origins. *The Half-Blood Prince* could save Harry Potter or leave us cheering for Valdemort. And while *Star Trek D-A-C* and *G.I. JOE* could be as tasty as a bucket of popcorn, how long will the fun last? Which leaves *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* as our game pick of the summer movie-licensed lot. Having begun life as a separate game and then turned into a movie tie-in, *Wolverine* looks more polished than most licensed games. Just how good is it? Check out the PTOM review on page 76 for the final word.


MILKING THE CASH COW: THE VENN DIAGRAM
Established Game Franchise
Celeb Voice Cast
Film Plot Divergence
Star Trek D-A-C
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
Harry Potter
Terminator Salvation
Wolverine
G.I. JOE: The Rise of Cobra

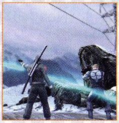


Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

Available: June
Publisher: Activision
Developer: LuxoFlux

Like *Iron Man,* the first *Transformers* film was one of the better summer blockbusters, yet was turned into a truly rotten game, but a much larger roster of robots might swing the sequel back into favor. Among the Autobot newbies are Arcee, who can separate into three motorbikes, and Jetfire, an SR-71 Blackbird who can combine with Optimus. New Decepticons include Sideways, an Audi R8, and Devastator, a 100-foot tall warrior made up of several construction vehicles.

Highlight: The promised faster, overhauled transformation system is up and running in good form.



G.I. JOE: The Rise of Cobra

Available: August
Publisher: EA
Developer: Double Helix

A PSN game similar in spirit to Capcom's *Wolf Of The Battlefield: Commando 3* reboot, *G.I. JOE* lets you play as one of 12 JOE characters or team up with a friend to kick Cobra butt. The action is frantic, the bullets relentless, and the weapons and vehicles ridiculously powerful. Mindless entertaining fun that could live up to the summer blockbuster spirit.

Highlight: The *LEGO Star Wars*-style secret rooms that can only be accessed with certain character classes, where you'll find 70 character and vehicle reference cards that unlock new characters and missions.

Star Trek D-A-C

Available: Now
Publisher: Paramount Games
Developer: Naked Sky Entertainment

Another PSN release, *Star Trek D-A-C* is a top-down tactical 3D shooter that pits the Federation against the Romulans, with the emphasis on 12-player online battles and co-op, although there's also a single-player campaign that pits you against bots. Along the way you can upgrade your ship by acquiring special power-up weapons and items. An amusing diversion for fans of the movie, but it's no *Star Trek Online* for serious gamers.

Highlight: Finding out what "D-A-C" stands for since the devs were being all coy about it prior to release.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Available: July
Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Bright Light

The one thing the *Harry Potter* games share with the films is they keep improving every time. That pattern looks to continue with this, the sixth *Potter* movie tie-in. The previous *Potter* game, *The Order of the Phoenix,* went big on the adventure side, but *The Half-Blood Prince* aims to find a balance between exploration and action that's broadly split between the return of Quidditch, mixing potions, and dueling with wands.

Highlight: The ability to move and fire during wand battles that brings a bit of strategy to the wizard-on-wizard action.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

Available: Now
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Raven Software

Previous *X-Men* games have spared us the gory details of what happens when Wolverine's razor-sharp claws meet soft flesh. Well, not any more. In this game, blood gushes and limbs are regularly hacked off—no wonder it's been slapped with a Mature rating. The promise of a more "adult" take should please fans of the grittier comic book incarnation and give the game an honest shot at respectability.

Highlight: Watching skin and muscular tissue regenerate over Wolverine's skeletal structure post-combat.

Terminator Salvation

Available: June
Publisher: Warner Bros. Int. Ent.
Developer: GRIN

Unusual for an action-heavy third-person shooter, this game's strongest quality could be its story. Rather than being a retread of the film's plot, it's set two years prior and explains how John Connor's leadership of the Resistance comes about. There's a slick cover system, heavily borrowed from another GRIN movie licensed tie-in, *Wanted.* But will it also be too short and linear like most licensed games?

Highlight: The game-exclusive, four-legged T7-T Tetrapod enemy.

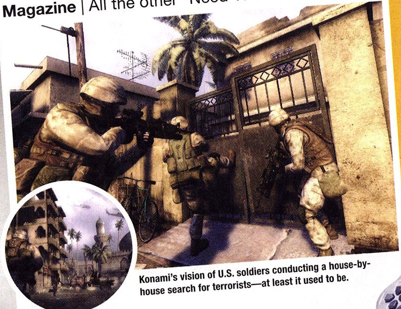
5 PTOM TIMES

PlayStation: The Official Magazine | All the other "Need To Know" highlights that you need to know

Will the next PSP look anything like this popular artist's conception making the rounds on the Internet?

PSP 2 Rumor Round-up

Rumor number one: it might not be called PSP 2. Some sources claim it will actually be called PSP Go! or possibly the PSP-4000. But whatever name Sony eventually settles on, the next iteration of the PlayStation Portable will likely be unveiled at E3 and be available as early as next September—according to Internet sources citing anonymous sources! Among the most oft-rumored features: an internal flash drive ranging from 8 to 16GB in size, a flip screen of some kind, and a second analog stick. Actually, the most recent round of rumors indicated that a second analog stick would *not* be a part of the new design. Oh, and bye bye to UMDs.



Konami's vision of U.S. soldiers conducting a house-by-house search for terrorists—at least it used to be.

Konami Ditches Six Days in Fallujah

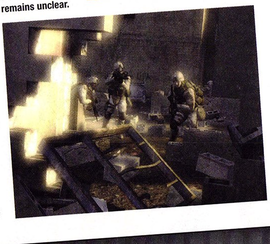
Public backlash and a critical press prompt Konami to backpedal

Even before *Six Days in Fallujah* arrived at Konami's Gamer Day event in April, the idea that developer Atomic Games was creating a videogame based on the current war in Iraq wrought much negative public reactions from numerous sources, including military families and some members of the press. And that despite the backing, contribution, and consultation with several veterans of the war. Less than two weeks after *Fallujah* debuted in San Francisco, Konami told Japanese national newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* that it had dropped the title.

In development by Atomic Games, *Six Days in Fallujah* is a first-person shooter based on U.S. soldiers' journals and diaries of their time in the Battle of Fallujah, one of the most dangerous and difficult battles during the war in Iraq. The game is designed around real maps and documents provided by the soldiers who saw active duty in the conflict, and street-by-street fights that re-create the battle in videogame form. Atomic also plans on using video interviews and personal accounts in the game to create an authentic look and feel.

As of press time, Atomic officials said they were planning on making an official statement, and they're assuredly looking for a new publisher. *Six Days in Fallujah* was originally slated for a winter 2010 release, but given the title's current situation, that date will almost certainly have to be pushed back.

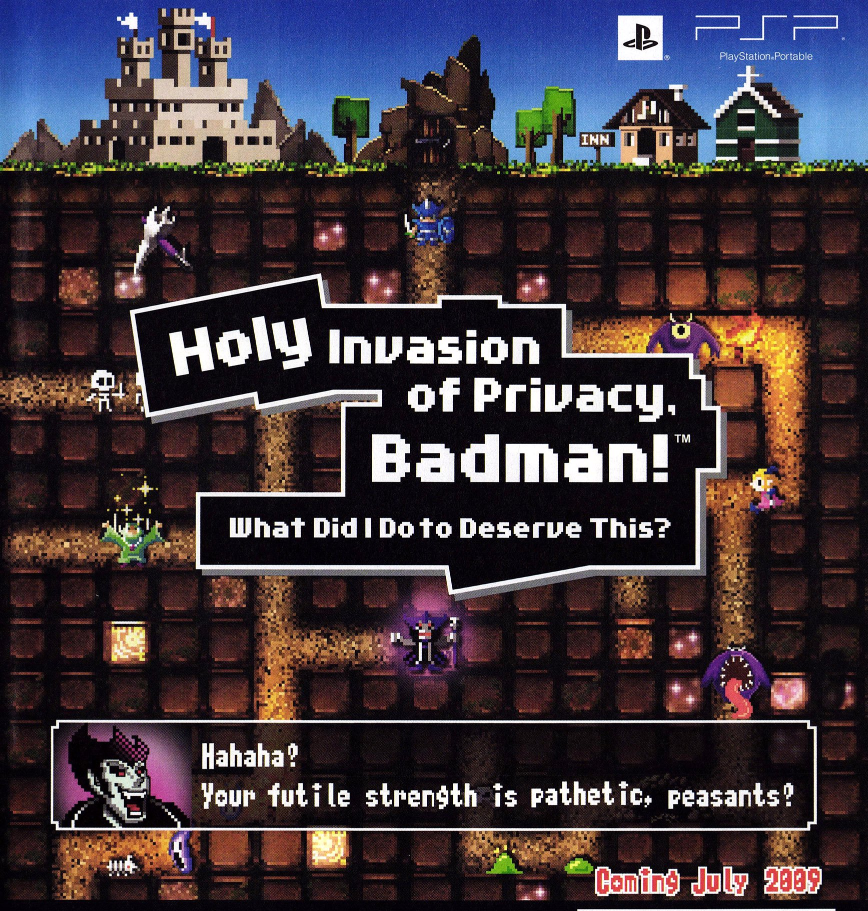
The statute of limitations on recreating and depicting current events in games remains unclear.



SONY'S MOST MONUMENTAL ANNOUNCEMENT EVER!

The mind-blowing, earth-shaking news about the PlayStation price drop we've all waited for:

The PlayStation 2 now costs $99…that is all.



Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman!™

What Did I Do to Deserve This?

Hahaha?
Your futile strength is pathetic, peasants?

Coming July 2009

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Blood
Mild Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes

NIS America

ACQUIRE®

Downloadable Demo available on PlayStation® Network
www.HolyBadman.com

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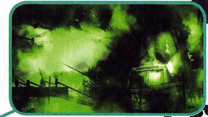
6

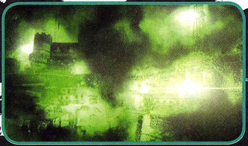
MODERN WARFARE 2

Who'd have thought a two-minute *Call of Duty* teaser trailer could reveal so much? We dissect every frame for clues you might have missed



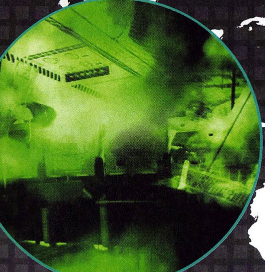
AMERICA

Yes, it's likely you'll be fighting on your own doorstep as the Russians try to turn the world against America. The high-rise buildings, electricity wires, and bus all suggest an urban or suburban, almost residential feel, but it's the shop advertising "Sports" goods to the left of the bus that gives it all away.



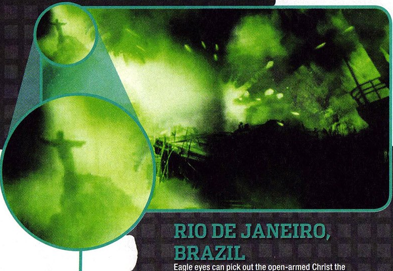
ENGLAND

It's a possibility. England is famous for its forts and castles, and the teaser definitely shows a tower of some sort, although the antenna behind it and the street lamps in front of it are a bit confusing. Britain's involvement ties in with the idea that the Russians are trying to turn countries against one another and start a global war.



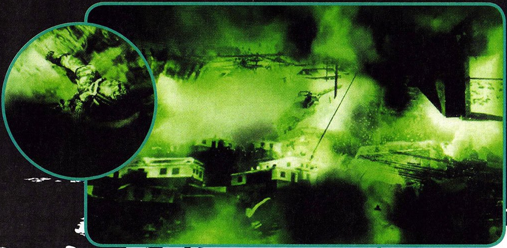
MILE HIGH CLUB

The bonus level in *Modern Warfare* ties in with the events in the teaser, and perhaps it may even make a comeback along with characters such as Soap and possibly Gaz depending on whether you believed he survived. The teaser shows the inside of a plane, a parachutist, and the remains of a plane cut in half.



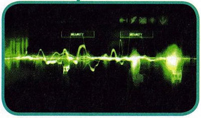
RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

Eagle eyes can pick out the open-armed Christ the Redeemer on a mountain-top, which overlooks Rio. As if you needed any confirmation, the buildings in the bottom-left hand corner of the second screen are typical of Brazil's or Ecuador's favelas. The narrow streets, sharp inclines and rooftop access in a typical favela should make for an awesome single-player and multiplayer map.



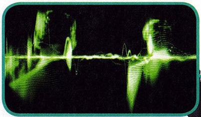
SIBERIA

Plenty of clues for this one: there's the snowy map terrain along with a snowplow making tracks, a soldier who seems to be wearing mountaineering gear trying to ascend a rocky face, and a close-up view of the snowplow with a pine tree to the right of it. How do we know there's a mission set in Siberia though? The HD version of the trailer provided by Activision was called "Siberia." Simple, really.



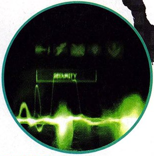
RUSSIA

The Russian airport sign translates to "Security Checkpoint." Also, just after the sound of the bag unzipping, one man says in Russian: "God is with us." A second man then says: "Remember, no Russian." It's likely the Russians are trying to disguise their identities in order to blame the airport massacre on another country. The Russian voice at the end of the teaser quotes Lenin when he says: "A revolution is not possible without a revolutionary situation."



JAPAN

There's little dialogue in the teaser, but the first thing we hear is a loudspeaker announcement in Japanese that sounds very similar to that which is used on the Japanese subway system.

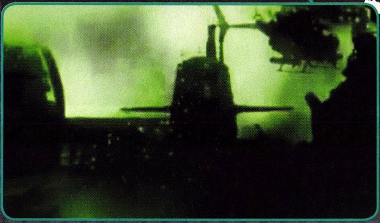


PERKS

The arrow on the right appears to be part of the environment, leaving us with four perks to mull over. From left to right, the first is the old Stopping Power perk, which increases a bullet's damage by 40-percent. The next is a winged foot, which could mean either a speed boost, a jump boost, or a modified Extreme Conditioning icon. The third may be a reworked Overkill icon, or a perk that combats a knife attack. The fourth perk is contentious, with suggestions ranging from a supply drop (most likely) to a revised Revive perk from *World At War*.

THE OCEAN

The teaser is full of naval references suggesting the sequel will go way beyond *Modern Warfare's* heavily scripted sinking boat level. The two scuba divers mean there's a mission set underwater, perhaps tied in with the submarine that we see in another screen, or the wreckage of the aircraft that appears to be underwater. We'll probably get to play as Navy SEALs, perhaps storming that pictured oil rig after swimming underwater to it to remain undetected.



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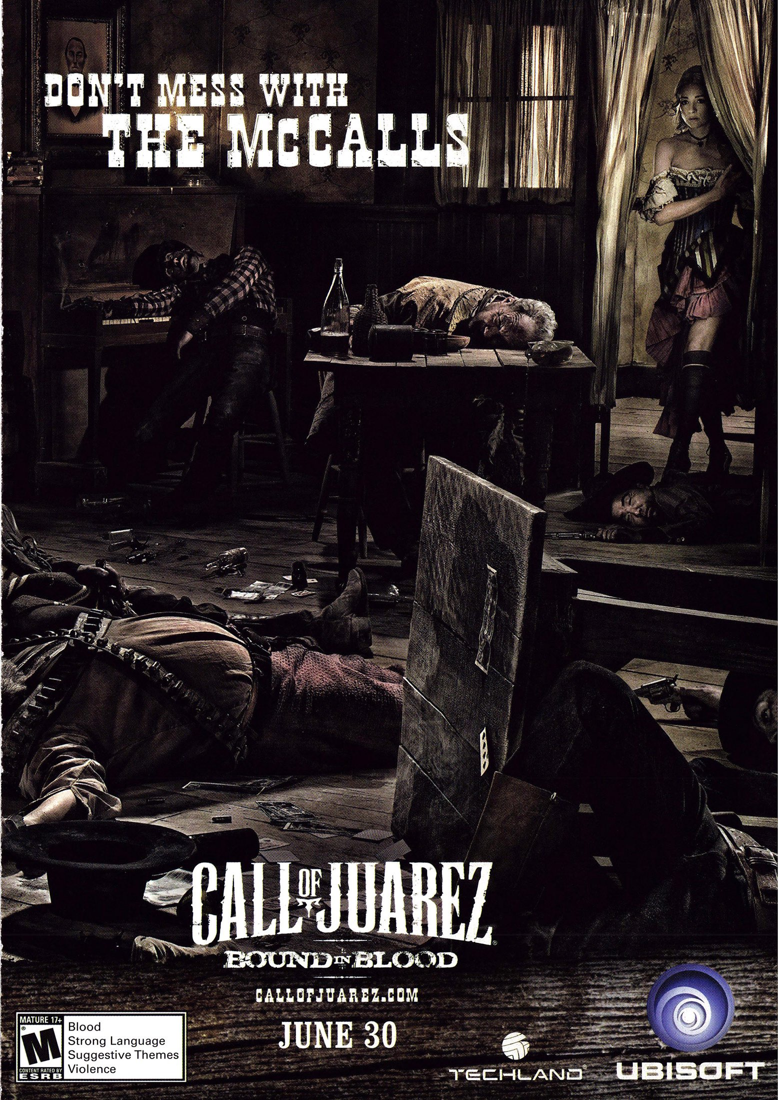
PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

PS3 PLAYSTATION 3

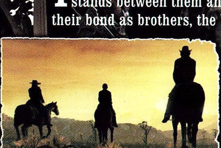
PlayStation Network

XBOX 360

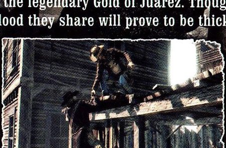
XBOX LIVE


DON'T MESS WITH
THE McCALLS
CALL OF JUAREZ
BOUND IN BLOOD
CALLOFJUAREZ.COM
JUNE 30
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
TECHLAND
UBISOFT

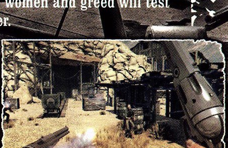
THE OLD WEST, 1864. In order to save their family, the McCall brothers will kill anyone who stands between them and the legendary Gold of Juarez. Though women and greed will test their bond as brothers, the blood they share will prove to be thicker.



Experience a story full of greed, lust, and lawlessness



Choose to embody Ray or Thomas, each with a distinctive gameplay style



Online multiplayer with unique modes, maps, and classes for hours of Wild West action

7 HARDWARE

SplitFish FragFX V2 controller

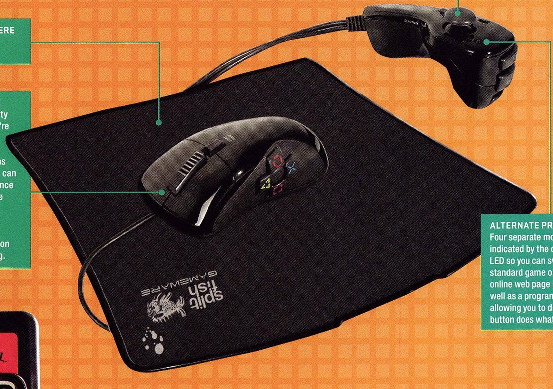
MSRP: $79.99 | Website: www.splitfish.com

For a truly different type of control experience, one that lends easy comparison to PC gaming, the FragFX puts all that Right-analog stick direction control (as well as the R1, R2, and R3 buttons, and the X, Circle, Triangle, and Square) all on a familiar multi-button mouse. The Left-stick controls, D-pad, PS button, sensitivity meter (for control fine-tuning, not adjusting your personal outlook and response to online smack-talking) are housed in a wired nunchuk-like controller. It all comes packaged with a responsive mouse pad, though the instructions inform us that the mouse sensitivity has been tested on jeans and other pant material, clearly tapping into the slovenly gaming posture, and likely attire, of its target demographic.

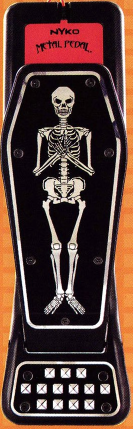
F IS FOR FRAG
The L1 and L2 buttons are joined by the Frag (F) button, designed to provide more fine-tune aiming in first-person shooter games. It's not easy to configure, and didn't work by default in the games we first tested (*Killzone 2* and *Call of Duty: World at War*).

NICE PAD YOU'VE GOT HERE
A mouse pad. Or your leg. Either works.

SPOTTY PERFORMANCE
Finding the ideal sensitivity spot for both the game you're playing and your personal preferences will take some trial and error. Instructions clearly indicate steps you can take to improve performance to suit your taste. It'll take some fiddling, but it can be impressively effective in action once you're comfortable with the button sensitivity and positioning.



ALTERNATE PROGRAMMING
Four separate modes are indicated by the color of the LED so you can switch between standard game operation and online web page browsing, as well as a programmable option allowing you to dictate what button does what.



Nyko Metal Pedal

MSRP: $19.99 | Website: www.nyko.com

Skeleton decal, coffin case packaging, faux leather jacket studs. Yep, this pedal is definitely metal, and thankfully, there's a little substance to back up the style. It's essentially a wider version of the standard *Rock Band* drum pedal—with rubber stoppers, a metal reinforcement plate, and a perilously short connection cable—but five dollars cheaper and compatible with all major drum sets, making it an ideal replacement/alternate pedal. Plus, it comes with a splitter that allows you to utilize the *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero: World Tour* drums' new double bass functionality. We were able to use the Metal Pedal's basic splitter to achieve double bass nirvana in *Guitar Hero: Metallica* using the *World Tour* kit. How appropriate, right?

dreamGEAR Quad Dock

MSRP: $29.99 | Website: www.dreamgear.net

There's not much to say about charge stations other than that they're handy for keeping your controllers charged, a convenient place to store your controllers, and most all models on the market get the job done adequately. What distinguishes the Quad Dock is the ability to charge four DualShock or Sixaxis controllers simultaneously, and we especially like how snuggly the unit holds them in place. The precise fit requires a bit of extra care when docking, but it's preferable to the dongle-system used by other chargers that can detach and go missing. But what is it with the über-bright LEDs on charge stations in general? Gamers *do* sleep in the dark, and you'll be hearing from us if a jumbo jet mistakenly lands in our Family room!

8

LAUGH RIOT

More of our chat with TV's funniest cop: Ben Garant

So the entirety of Comedy Central's long-running *Reno 911!* is now available for download on the PSN, and in last issue's Video Delivery section, we talked to creator, producer, and star of the show Ben Garant about which episodes you need to check out. But of course, that's not all we talked about. So here now is another chunk of our talk with Ben, which includes the shocking revelation that he is, in fact, *not* a gamer.

Ben Garant: Yeah so, I didn't want to fake it, I didn't want to be like, "Oh sure, *Halo* blah, blah, blah." I have nothing against videogames, I was just one of the kids that didn't have one growing up. I just don't play videogames.

PTOM: Not everyone does. Any chance we can indoctrinate you somehow?
BG: I like those games where you can pick who you are, and you can pick that you're a really stacked chick with the Mohawk…I don't know, so maybe I'm not the one you should be talking to. I think that says more about me than the videogame world.

You'd be surprised. You are going to have to tell me about the inevitable *Reno 911!* videogame, though. Surely there are plans for one.
BG: I think if there was a *Reno 911!* videogame, it would be really great if we were the cops in like…*Grand Theft Auto.* So we'd be driving around in Reno and its horrible, horrible, horrible, and chaos is going on outside. I did play the *Simpsons* game and that was really, really funny but the idea of doing a funny version with just as much murder as *GTA*…but with a comedy slant. I like that idea.

Yeah, I like the idea of playing the cops that go to the Emergency Room after getting beat up. You get the whole picture.
BG: We don't get to step into *GTA* for playing it for an hour or two. We're the guys who live there and have to enforce the laws, and we come and clean up after somebody has just killed a hooker with a baseball bat somewhere.

It sounds like a real gritty game.
BG: Well, you know, we'll have jokes in between. We'll be making funny jokes.

Yeah, hooker death is always comedy gold.
BG: Always funny, always funny. All the way to the bank, my friend. Six seasons and counting.

Congratulations on that, by the way. Very long running show—six seasons is a big success.
BG: Yeah, we're having a lot of fun. It's great. For Comedy Central, that's a long time to have been on the air. They let us do our thing, and we just try to crack each other up and hire hot stripper extras. We're having a really good time.

So let's talk about your character for a second here. Where did the basis of Deputy Travis Junior come from? Is it pretty close to you as a person or is it completely created?
BG: My uncle Ed was a sheriff for the Rutherford County police department, and he had a glass eye. When I was little, he used to take out the glass eye and scare me with it. I would hide behind the couch, and he would pretend he could see through the glass eye when it was in his hand. And so he would stick it behind the couch and say, "I see you boy, I see you boy." I think maybe Travis Junior is my Uncle Ed.

On a similar subject, how do cops react to you now? Do you have any interesting law enforcement-related stories?
BG: Cops love us! We've had so many cops say, "You know what? Your show is the closest to being real as any show on television." Which is kind of scary. They say, "It's like you've got a microphone in our morning briefing room." Which is also kind of scary. We've all gotten out of tickets. I got pulled over in Arizona, and we were shooting so I had the crazy moustache and the haircut that I have. He pulled over and he was like this big, giant 6'4" ex-marine scary Arizona State Trooper and had like this big tough expression on his face. He walked over and when he looked at me, he just cracked up and said, "You're lucky I think you're funny, boy!" Cops love us. We shoot in a real cop station and so cops pitch us jokes all the time. And sometimes we do them.

9 FIGHTING SPIRIT

Capcom crowns the king of the streets

In honor of the *Street Fighter* franchise's proud tradition of competition, Capcom—in partnership with GameStop and the EVO Championship series—decided to mark the release of *Street Fighter IV* with what they called "the biggest live event in gaming history": an open national tournament hosted by more than 2,400 GameStops all across the country. The grand prize? An official *Street Fighter IV* arcade machine (not to mention a free trip to San Francisco for the finals)!

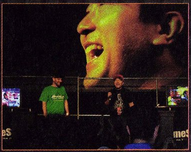
The competition kicked off on February 21st with 64-player, single-loss elimination tournaments held at each of the participating stores. The top two players from every store advanced to the district finals a week later, and the winners of those tournaments earned a spot in the regional finals on March 14, which eventually whittled the field of contenders down to just 16 players (all of whom were automatically qualified for this year's EVO World Finals in Las Vegas).

This elite group of fighters met in San Francisco on April 18th to determine not only who among them was most worthy of the professional-grade arcade cabinet but who would represent the U.S. in an international exhibition match against Asia's top competitors that very same night. After nearly two months of intense competition, the stage was finally set for the *Street Fighter IV* National Championships, and we were on hand to chronicle all of the heart-stopping action.

As thousands of fighting fans packed into San Francisco's Fort Mason Festival Pavilion, the finalists took the stage before the single-loss tournament got underway. With giant banners depicting *Street Fighter's* iconic characters hanging from the rafters and an impressively professional audio/visual setup chronicling every moment, the atmosphere was more akin to a professional sporting event than a mere videogame tournament.

Needless to say, the action was absolutely incredible and every player put up a good fight, but when the dust settled, the famed Justin Wong (Rufus) emerged victorious with a four to one victory over Mike Ross—another fighting game community favorite—in the tournament's final match. Justin's hyper-offensive onslaught proved to be too much for the competition to handle.

But the real show had only just begun. After savoring his brief moment of victory, Justin stepped back into the ring to face Korean National Champion Poongko, Japanese National Champion Iyo, and *Street Fighter* legend Daigo Umehara. Though he eventually lost to Daigo, Justin certainly won over the crowd, seen here mimicking the final move in Rufus' Ultra as Justin finishes off Poongko.



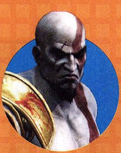
The highlight of the evening, however, wasn't the fighting, but the fan service. *Street Fighter IV* Producer Yoshinori Ono (above) enthusiastically thanked the crowd for their support; community maestro Seth Killian served as an admirable ad hoc MC and fight commentator; cosplay characters roamed the floor; and free swag was abundant (especially for those who donated to the event's food drive). An all around great event.

10 THE BURNING QUESTION

This month, we asked developers:
What game do you wish you had worked on?

Adam Puhl
LEAD COMBAT DESIGNER *(GOD OF WAR III)*
SONY SANTA MONICA

"That's pretty easy. There's a couple. I'm a huge *Castlevania* fan…*Symphony of the Night* is one of my all-time favorite games. But also the *Metroid* series ranks right up there."



Stig Asmussen
GAME DIRECTOR *(GOD OF WAR III)*
SONY SANTA MONICA

"I wish I'd worked on *Oblivion,* the first *Devil May Cry, Resident Evil 4, Resident Evil* one. I really like the Bioware games, too. My opinion of these things has changed the longer I've been in the industry. As much as I love *Grand Theft Auto,* I wouldn't want to work on it because I don't think it would be interesting for me to make something where the scale is that large, that vast."

Matt Mortan
PRODUCER *(PIXELJUNK)*
SONY SANTA MONICA

"*Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare.* I used to work at Activision and have eight years of experience with shooters, and *Call of Duty 4* is an awesome game that changed the rules for first-person shooters."

Giovanni Luis
SUPERVISOR TECHNICAL ART GROUP *(GOD OF WAR III)*
SONY SANTA MONICA

"I don't know. I like working on *God of War.* If I had to pick, I'd go for something the complete opposite, like *Guitar Hero.* Something simple, not too demanding, but still fun. Only because of the work involved in what we do here [at Sony Santa Monica]. I'd go from this crazy, epic, long-duration game to something very simple and fun to play."

Steve Caterson
SENIOR PRODUCER *(GOW III)*
SONY SANTA MONICA

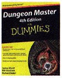
"Call of Duty (the original), *Half-Life, Myst, Doom, Centipede."*

Justin Richmond
GAME DESIGNER *(UNCHARTED 2)* AT NAUGHTY DOG

"I would have loved to have worked on any one of the *Metal Gear Solid* games because I idolize that franchise. And *LittleBigPlanet* as well. The *LBP* guys came to see Naughty Dog once, and they're just a really cool bunch of guys, really friendly, a really cool gang."

ETCETERA

All the *other* stuff that delights the PTOM staff and distracts us from our work—information that you too can use to belittle us.



Dungeon Master 4th Edition for Dummies | Book | $24.99
Playing with the new 4th Edition *D&D* rules is one thing. Learning how to run a campaign and manage a rule format that really does echo *World of Warcraft* (or other PC MMOs) is another challenge entirely. This *Dummies* book presents a ton of in-game situations you're likely to encounter along with brisk solutions and situational direction, all presented in a chatty manner that's informative and not a bit condescending. It's helping one staff member who's still stuck in the *D&D* closet and isn't comfortable being outted. [Rob.]

Ywriter 5 | Software | Free
Teresa enjoys writing fiction in her spare time, but the reason [that she claims] you haven't seen her name in the bestseller list yet is because she has trouble organizing the multiple plotlines in her stories. Then she found *yWriter,* a free novel writing software that lets her, among other things, break her novel into scenes (which she can drag-and-drop to re-order), jot down character and setting descriptions in special sections, and set daily word count targets for herself. Aspiring novelists, pick it up at www.spacejock.com/yWriter5.html.

Wolverine: The Anniversary | Comic | $4.99
Written by one William Harms, the author of vampire comic story *Impaler* (available in trade paperback, and now the first couple of issues of the ongoing serial), former editor at sister mag *PC Gamer,* and writer on Sucker Punch's *inFamous,* this is a one-shot short-form story. It's good fodder if you're in a Wolverine mood after seeing the movie and want to capture more of the spirit of the character.

Jones Soda | Beverage | Um, soda priced?
Hey, you know what's pretty great? Soda. You know what's even better? Jones Soda. Why? Well, they don't use high-fructose corn syrup (seriously, that stuff is terrible for you), they offer unique and amazing flavors like Raspberry and Green Apple, and they use fan-submitted photos on their labels! Oh, and they usually release special seasonal sodas like Pumpkin Pie and Brussels Sprouts for the holidays. They're disgusting and awesome!

Trophy Whoring | Activity | Your Dignity (and all your free time)
Here's the problem: when we review a game like *Killzone 2* or *Call of Duty,* we often can't use our normal PSN IDs. That means we don't get Trophies. Later on, when we are able to use our PSN accounts, we have to decide whether it's worth replaying the entire game just for the Trophies. Teresa compromises: her new goal is to earn as many Trophies as she can with only PSN games. Come on, Trophy level 5! Here she comes!

Dean Kamen's Robotic "Luke" Arm | Prosthetic | An arm, but not a leg
It's kind of weird for Carlos the Intern to say he wouldn't mind losing an arm… But as he so giddily asked us, "Have you seen the new advancement in Robotic arms?" When we informed him that the answer was "No," because the rest of the staff is relatively normal, he eagerly directed us to www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0_mLumx-6Y. Carlos says he'd choose the *Bionic Commando* or Revolver Ocelot model. Um, okay…

Subway's Footlong sandwich | Food | $5
Readers may not be aware of it, but a lot of late hours go into producing this agglomeration of gaming goodness we call PTOM. And we need fuel in our bellies to keep our literary genius flowing! Sure, Subways may not be the height of culinary delight, but it sure hits the spot at five bucks a pop. See how that line just rolls off the tongue? We can heartily recommend the Italian BMT or the Meatball sandwich.

Mega64.com | Website | Freeee!
Videogames are serious business. Very serious. The visionary filmmakers behind Mega64 know this. In their ongoing series of high-concept short films, they offer dramatic interpretations of our medium's most beloved games, accentuating their inherent artistic value while maintaining an unspoken reverence for the source material. With unassailable conceptual integrity and nigh flawless execution, the project demands the attention of all true videogame aficionados. [Care to say that again in English, Scott?]

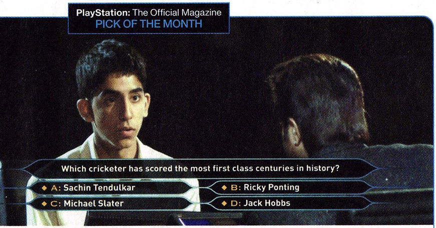
Troy Hurtubise Bear Suit | Personal Armor | $15,000 (if produced)
Since *Iron Man* cosplay just isn't enough to satisfy Carlos the Intern's armor fetish, he's been investigating Troy Hurtubise's Bear Suit, which can apparently withstand a Grizzly Bear attack and much, much more. See it in action at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3CzYw5-qdA. "Yeah, I know—nothing really spectacular," admits our budding knight sans armor, "But falling down a cliff sure looks like fun." Time to step away from the YouTube, Carlos…

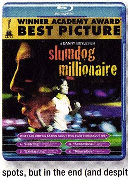
MBT Black Sport | Shoes | $250 (no kidding)
In the May issue, Roger was dreaming about snagging a free pair of MBT shoes to investigate their difficult-to-believe health benefits. Well, curiosity got the better of Roger (and his bank account) so he actually went out and *bought* a pair. Even more amazingly, Roger says that a whole range of nagging back and leg pains have disappeared since he's started wearing the shoes. Roger's officially joined the cult of MBT, but he has no idea how he can afford any more pairs of the sublime, albeit goofy looking, shoes.

Blu-ray Central

It's summer, it's hot, and misguided do-gooders believe the great outdoors is where you should be. Screw 'em and screw the sun. Stay indoors and catch up on all the cool movies you might have missed.

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH


Which cricketer has scored the most first class centuries in history?
A: Sachin Tendulkar
B: Ricky Ponting
C: Michael Slater
D: Jack Hobbs



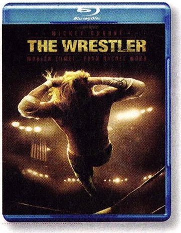
Slumdog Millionaire

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | As the Academy's object of affection, *Slumdog Millionaire* is a clever chameleon of a movie. Marketed as some kind of heart-warming, romantic fairy tale, the movie is anything but. Essentially a damning statement of just how bad life still is for the majority of India's population, Danny Boyle has made the extremely harsh and inhumane content more palatable by putting it all inside a rather trite, fictitious dreams-do-come-true game show wrapper. Make no mistake, the movie isn't heart warming or particularly romantic; it's uncomfortably funny in spots, but in the end (and despite the Bollywood-style musical number finale) this is a harsh and uncomfortable story that deserves to be seen.

| EXTRAS | *Slumdog* is reasonably packed with good stuff, though too much of it is in standard definition. The deleted scenes are excellent, and the commentary track with Director Danny Boyle and leading man Dev Patel is terrific. The second commentary track is much drier, but both are informative. There's a rather strange Indian short film as well, but overall it's a very solid package.

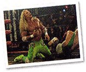
MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★



The Wrestler

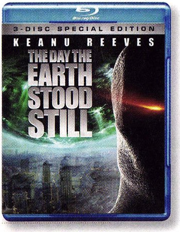
PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Ignoring all the press about the amazing performance of Mickey Rourke, *The Wrestler* is really a small movie that managed to do great big things. This depressing story of a former champion pro wrestler paints his lifestyle and the inevitable consequences in a blisteringly realistic, sometimes hard to take way. It's a fascinating, truly amazing look at a human train wreck, and well worth the acclaim.



| EXTRAS | For so acclaimed a release, the extras are remarkably light—there's two shorts, and a Bruce Springsteen music video. The making-of video is pretty good, and the second is an unusual discussion with old wrestlers. Both shorts are worth watching, but expect a special edition in the near future.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★



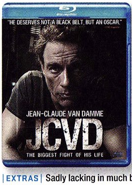
The Day the Earth Stood Still

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | A movie that really didn't need to be made, yet is still surprisingly good. Keanu Reeves is in his ideal acting range as an emotionless alien, and the special effects are top notch. But where the first movie had a message that was made with subtlety, here that message is completely obscured by the effects. In the end, this modern Klaatu makes more of a mess than any great accomplishment. Still, it's surprisingly watchable for sci-fi and disaster movie fans.

| EXTRAS | Decent commentary, picture-in-picture functionality, deleted scenes, several interesting making-of shorts, and a pointless make-your-own-GORT game. The best extra is the inclusion of the original 1951 film, which is both gorgeous on Blu-ray and still a much better movie than the remake.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½


"HE DESERVES NOT A BLACK BELT, BUT AN OSCAR."
JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME
JCVD
THE BIGGEST FIGHT OF HIS LIFE

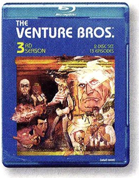
JCVD

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Not since *Being John Malkovich* has an actor put himself out so precariously while playing himself, yet *JCVD* showcases, of all people, Jean Claude Van Damme's acting chops in a way that's never been seen. *JCVD* is an amazingly offbeat and bold film that mixes fiction, diatribe, and reality. It's a rather slow and methodical experience, and ironically unlikely to appeal to fans of his movies. Yet, for *film* lovers, this is a fascinating and truly original release.

| EXTRAS | Sadly lacking in much beyond a couple deleted scenes including a rather bizarre Van Damme monologue.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★½



The Venture Bros. 3rd Season

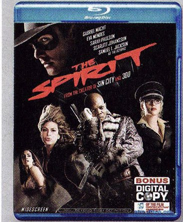
PRICE: $44.98 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | *The Venture Bros.* have built a much deserved following over three seasons, and their Blu-ray debut is a cause for celebration. Keeping animation safe for filthy-minded adults, every episode is irreverent comedy gold. The show started off as a parody of *Jonny Quest,* but has evolved into something far more outrageous. The Atari 2600 cartridge packaging is great, and for lovers of smart, naughty, and socially inappropriate humor, you won't find much better than these brothers.

| EXTRAS | Great commentary for each of the 13 episodes, deleted scenes, a music CD... Oh my!

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★

AND NOW... A TALE OF TWO MILLERS



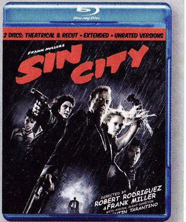
The Spirit

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Film schools very well might start using *The Spirit* as the perfect example of how not to make a movie. Frank Miller has embraced Hollywood, yet seems incapable of understanding the inherent differences between comic books and film. Beyond the expected terrible dialogue that hounds his noir-obsessed work, *The Spirit* is just a convoluted mess. Like a limp comic book that was given partial digital celluloid life, there are moments of greatness here, but Miller just doesn't seem to grasp how to make a movie. Still, as far as blatant cinematic failures go, *The Spirit* is hilariously watchable, and even enjoyable. The main character is likeable, Samuel L. Jackson is absurdly funny, and the parade of gorgeous women doesn't hurt either.

| EXTRAS | Sadly, the commentary is lackluster, though the three featurettes are quite good. There's gimmicky BD-Live support that lets you download all kinds of *Spirit*-related goodies like ring tones and wallpaper.

MOVIE ★★½
EXTRAS ★★★



Sin City

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Unlike Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez does understand the differences between the pages of a comic book and a film. *Sin City* is a brutal, over-the-top masterpiece that's so viscerally watchable that even the terrible dialogue can't bring it down off it's depressively depraved yet exhilarating high. This might just be a re-release of the director's cut DVD, but the movie is absolutely stunning in HD and worth buying again. It doesn't look quite as good as the amazingly pristine *Spirit*, but is still a reference-quality title.

| EXTRAS | If you had the original special edition DVD, you've seen most of what there is to offer here—it's essentially the same with two exceptions. One is a sort of interactive comic book, which is a gimmick to be sure, but a cool one. The other is an expansive picture-in-picture feature that is far more in-depth than any other disc around. Overall, it packs in an amazing volume of features that will take hours to peruse.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★★

QUICK TAKES

Quantum of Solace

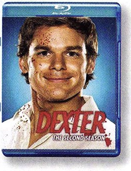
+ Not quite Casino Royale, but still one of the best action movies of the past year.

Yes Man

− Moderately worth a rental, and yet utterly forgettable.

X-Men Trilogy

+ The first two *X-men* movies look amazing in Blu, there are hours of extras, and the third movie still sucks.



Dexter: The Second Season

PRICE: $59.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

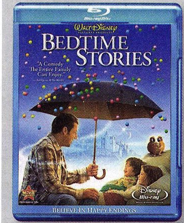
MOVIE | *Dexter* remains one of the most intriguing shows on TV, and he shines on Blu-ray. Season two trumps the first year in everyway. There's more sex, violence, drama, and dark humor, yet the show never loses sight of its characters. This season, the plot focuses on the FBI closing in on Dexter, and every episode is excellent.

EXTRAS | Like season one, season two is light on extras, focusing on downloadable promos for other Showtime shows and some making-of shorts. Maybe season three will offer more added insight.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

Jason D'Aprile would like to suggest that the Coen Brothers' *Barton Fink* and *The Wrestler* make a wonderfully ironic, yet suiting double feature. Sadly, *Barton Fink* is not yet on Blu-ray. Questions? Comments? Rants? Send them to **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

AND THE DISNEY ROUND-UP...



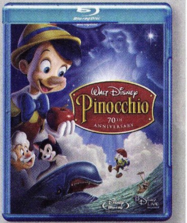
Bedtime Stories

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | Adam Sandler's brand of comedy transfers to kids movies smoothly in this goofily enjoyable if slight take on an idiot finding his worth by spending time with his sister's kids. It's fun stuff, although older viewers will likely find Sandler's inept Skeeter a bit too much to take at times.

| EXTRAS | A gag reel and lame deleted scenes lead off a surprisingly light load of extras—there's only a few really short featurettes otherwise.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★½



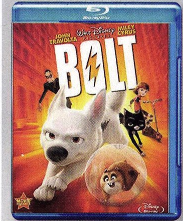
Pinocchio

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** G

| MOVIE | The classic is reborn yet again, and with beautiful results. A labor of love, *Pinocchio* is revered for a reason: 70 years later, the movie still stands tall as one of the greatest animated features ever made, and the Blu-ray version is fantastic.

| EXTRAS | Two discs of extras accompany this classic, and animation lovers are treated to hours of insight. It's a great overall package.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★★★



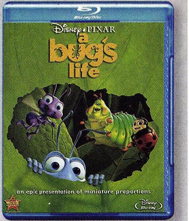
Bolt

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | Though certainly not one of Disney's best, *Bolt* is an engaging tale of a confused dog actor who, in a *Truman Show*-like turn, doesn't know he's an actor until he finds himself out in the real world. A psychotic hamster and streetwise alley cat liven up the exploits, and kids are sure to enjoy all the fuzzy, furry adventures. Like most recent Disney CG affairs, the humor often works well for adults as well, and little girls in particular will likely eat this one up.

| EXTRAS | Disney usually packs in the extras, yet *Bolt* is surprisingly lackluster. Several short making-of bits, a terrible game, and deleted scenes. The saving grace is the included short, *Super Rhino*, which is great.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★



A Bug's Life

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | One of the earliest, if not the first completely digital transfers when initially released on DVD, *A Bug's Life* earns kudos for not just looking great, but taking its plot from one of the greatest movies of all time—*The Seven Samurai*. Funny, creative, and with more than a little bite, this under-appreciated gem definitely deserves attention in HD.

| EXTRAS | Like the original multi-disc DVD releases, *A Bug's Life* is packed with extras. If you've already gone through the DVD though, you've seen and heard almost everything: excellent commentary, a slew of featurettes going into all aspects of the movie, and the short film, *Geri's Game*.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★

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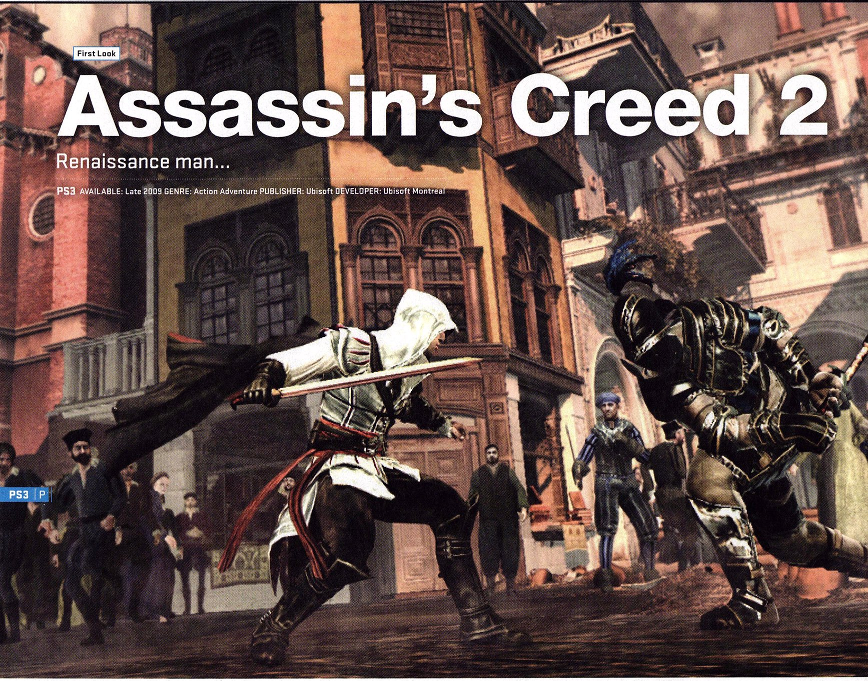


First Look

Assassin's Creed 2

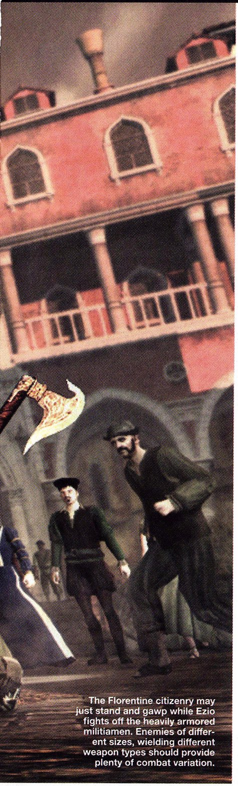
Renaissance man...

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Late 2009 **GENRE:** Action Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Montreal

What a perfect time and place for intrigue and adventure. The Italian Renaissance of the 15th century had it all: politics and religion, sex and death, art and culture, technology and tradition. Its cast of real characters is a who's who of contributors to modern thought that endures today: Leonardo da Vinci, Machiavelli, the Medicis, and Borgias. Let's add Ezio Auditore di Firenzi to that list. Well, maybe he'll have to earn his position among such lauded company, or to be more precise; you'll have to help him earn his legacy. Altair of the original *Assassin's Creed* is out. Ezio is in for the sequel, and it took just a few short minutes of description to generate tremendous excitement for the gaming possibilities ensconced within the *Assassin's Creed 2* design document.

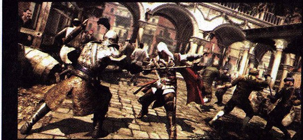
As the original game faded to black, leaving unanswered questions and Altair in the dark, the next step remained unclear. Not a lot has changed in our understanding of the status of the future/present characters; Ubisoft remains tight-lipped about some of those details, much like they did about that whole story branch in the build up to the original game launch. But it was confirmed to us that this story starts the very moment the original game ended (and since it's now available as part of the PlayStation 3 Greatest Hits line, you've really no excuse not to play it to its conclusion).

So what do we know? Despite being generally lauded as one of the most original and stylish new IP releases, *Assassin's Creed* took knocks for some of its less polished design decisions. Wrestling a new engine (particularly on the PS3) around a fresh gameplay notion took its toll. Time constraints resulted in a rush to round out the experience, and that translated into repetitious missions as Altair dutifully followed prescribed

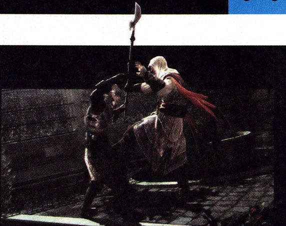


The Florentine citizenry may just stand and gawp while Ezio fights off the heavily armored militiamen. Enemies of different sizes, wielding different weapon types should provide plenty of combat variation.

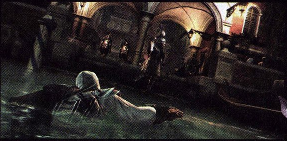
Got the moves



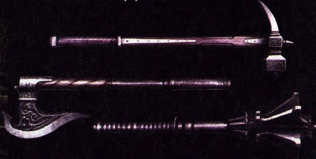
EZIO IS AN ACCOMPLISHED COMBATANT right from the get-go, and will be able to perform many more moves than Altair could manage. Apparently some 20 weapons will be available, though a Trophy will be awarded if you go through the entire game using just the concealed blades. Upgrades to those weapons (provided by Leonardo's ongoing research, no doubt) will at least give you a chance.



IF DISARMING DOESN'T WORK, how about planting a Glasgow kiss on a militiaman getting too close? That's a head butt, by the way, part of Ezio's arsenal of street fighting combat techniques. He also has additional throws that, when blended with the weapons variety and other moves should contribute to many dynamic encounters.



IN ADDITION TO A RANGE OF SWORDS, axes, and spears, Ezio will also be able to make use of rudimentary smoke bombs, which should be handy for those derring-do getaways.



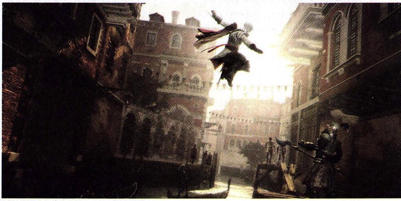
EZIO CAN DISARM ANY OPPONENT, and with more short- and long-range weapons providing greater variation in each combat encounter, you'll likely have to think strategically and cautiously about each showdown.

orders. The team (apparently numbering around 200 people) has absorbed the media and user feedback with the specific goal of addressing those commonly referenced weaknesses. That will translate, so we're told, into more "milestone" moments, and for them to occur in places and situations you won't necessarily be expecting them. You'll still have the freedom to traipse around the Tuscan countryside and the cities of Florence, Venice (and we're guessing, but it's not confirmed) Rome and possibly Milan, and climb towers and traverse rooftops.

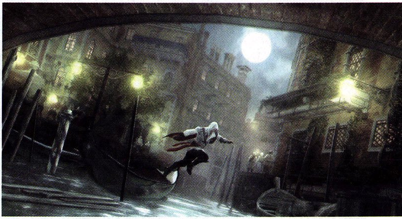
We also know that you'll fill the shoes of Ezio, pitched as a mysterious member of the well-to-do community, and given his name, initially a product of Florence. Carving out differences from Altair, Ezio has a family; he has panache, his more extrovert personality casting him as a ladies man. He also discovers that he's an ancestor of the Assassins. Plus, (like he's going to need a leg up or more excuse to get into mischief) he has intriguing friends, acquaintances, and powerful enemies.

It's whom you know

Assassin's Creed 2 will begin in the year 1476. Interesting year, fascinating era. Leonardo da Vinci was a relatively young man, about your age, in fact, and turns out he's a friend of yours. Handy, as the inventive Leonardo is able to design and supply the retractable blades hidden in your sleeves that provide an instant deadly weapon (without needing you to remove a finger to make them fit). Not only that, but his helicopter design becomes an interactive reality in *Assassin's Creed 2*, adding an aerial opportunity to the 15th century setting. That's in ➔



Is it a bird, is it a plane? Wait, *what* is this *plane* of which you speak? Instead of gawping, how about lifting your weapon and skewering Ezio? Assassin kebab?



A full moon over the canals of 15th century Venice...surely time to sit at the bars in St. Mark's square and drink in the beauty, not skulk through the shadows on some perilous mission. Or is that just us?

addition to the stagecoaches you can ride (and possibly attack) and gondolas in Venice, where hopefully you can take a steady (romantic?) ride through the waterways.

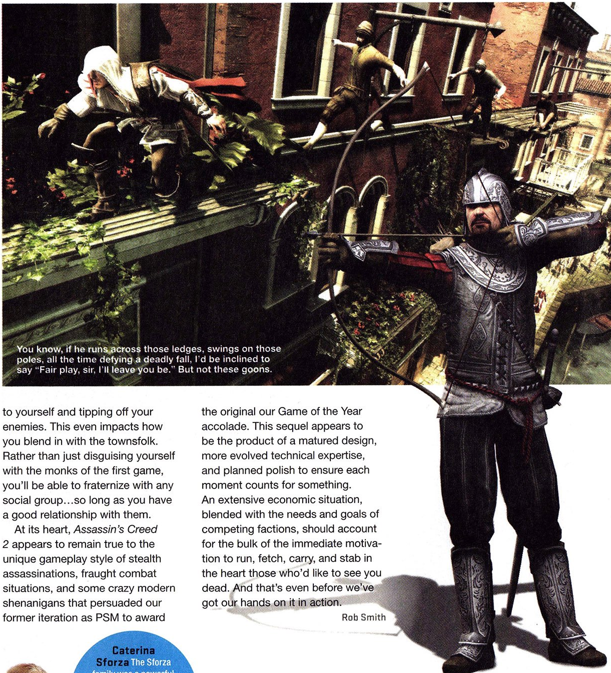
Each location will lend itself to unique gameplay opportunities. Climbing the Duomo in Florence? Yeah, we'll do that. Racing across the rooftops of Venice before swan diving (stylishly, of course) into the canal to get away from pursuers? Can't wait. Hiding in a haystack from which you can pounce and surprise a mark? If you insist. Just getting a hint at the potential experiences in these settings is sufficient to get us giddy to know more.

The political machinations of the time will evidently play a significant role in the intrigue. In your corner will be Leonardo, the Medicis, and the Florentine courtesans (oh yes). Even the destitute of the city will offer assistance (assuming you can trust them) if you treat them well, like some Italian Robin Hood. In the other corner, fanning the flames of family and religious conflict are the Pazzis and the Borgias. What appears to be a dynamic story progression will be impacted by your actions around NPCs. By performing tasks for your friends you'll earn notoriety, and now comes the balancing act. How far do you push your growing fame? You'll need a certain social standing in order to garner the favor of the senior aristocracy, but by the same token will need to avoid calling too much attention to yourself and tipping off your enemies. This even impacts how you blend in with the townsfolk. Rather than just disguising yourself with the monks of the first game, you'll be able to fraternize with any social group…so long as you have a good relationship with them.

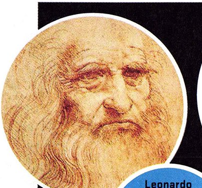
At its heart, *Assassin's Creed 2* appears to remain true to the unique gameplay style of stealth assassinations, fraught combat situations, and some crazy modern shenanigans that persuaded our former iteration as PSM to award the original our Game of the Year accolade. This sequel appears to be the product of a matured design, more evolved technical expertise, and planned polish to ensure each moment counts for something. An extensive economic situation, blended with the needs and goals of competing factions, should account for the bulk of the immediate motivation to run, fetch, carry, and stab in the heart those who'd like to see you dead. And that's even before we've got our hands on it in action.

Rob Smith

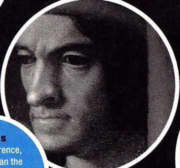
PS3 | P

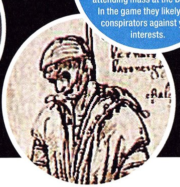

You know, if he runs across those ledges, swings on those poles, all the time defying a deadly fall, I'd be inclined to say "Fair play, sir, I'll leave you be." But not these goons.

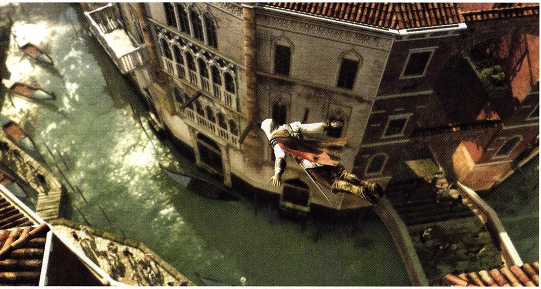
SUPPORTING CAST


Leonardo da Vinci Though believed to be in trouble with the law around 1476 (on a sodomy charge, of all things), we're figuring the game won't delve too far into that plot offshoot.

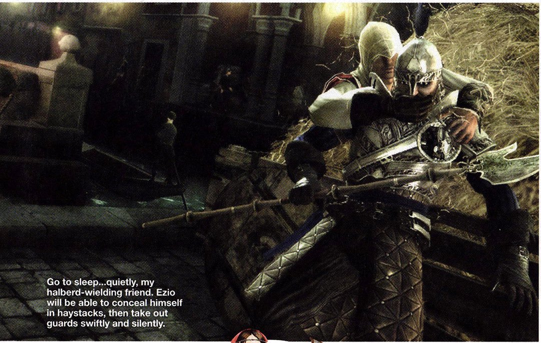
Caterina Sforza The Sforza family was a powerful Milanese outfit, but with skeletons aplenty in its closets. Giovanni Sforza was famous for being the first husband of the infamous Lucrezia Borgia.


Medicis Rulers of Florence, the Medicis ran the banking system of the age, and supported the flourishing Renaissance art movement of the time.


Pazzis Smaller-scale banking family, also from Florence, and famous for the "Pazzi Conspiracy" of 1478 where family members conspired to have two of the Medicis murdered while attending mass at the Duomo. In the game they likely fund conspirators against your interests.

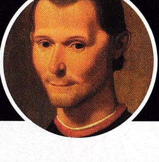


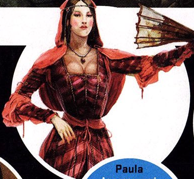
Looks like a peaceful swan dive into the drink... But there's likely a platoon of local militia hot on Ezio's tail to make this seem like a good idea.



Go to sleep...quietly, my halberd-wielding friend. Ezio will be able to conceal himself in haystacks, then take out guards swiftly and silently.

Machiavelli
The philosopher and political thinker/scientist was born in 1469, and so was active around the period covered in *AC2*. Could be another ally or information source for our hero.





Paula
As a renowned ladies man, Ezio will enlist the help of the Florentine courtesans. How far do those relationships go? Hot coffee?

Mona Lisa
Leonardo's most famous model apparently plays a role, and will appear in the game. So if you come across Lisa Gherardini, look closely to see if she's smiling.

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Future

You'll guard trains, attack trains, attack the bandits attacking trains, and probably ride on trains to take you from the dusty Frontier to the greener pastures of The North.

PS3 | P

Red Dead Redemption

First Look

Grand Theft Horses

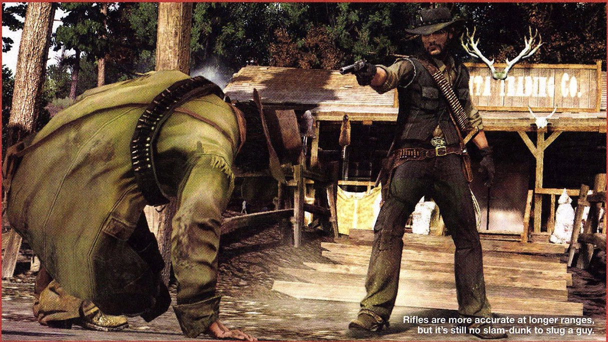
PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Action Adventure PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego

That ramshackle hut may be your own personal homestead. Maybe you'll be able to upgrade to a tree house. Or go crazy with a two-room property if you earn enough cash.

As ambitious in size and scale as any *GTA?* That's the initial positioning claim powering Rockstar's return to the wild, wild west. The original *Red Dead Revolver* was a solid, but niche, release (its PS2 Metacritic rating nets out at a 72), but on the back of the new technology *Redemption* seeks to build on that start and blow out its "mythical west" setting. The first decade of the 20th century is a time when the lawlessness of the frontier was eroding as government and individualism introduced structure in the wilderness. Steam trains are bringing people, business, and opportunity. The fledgling telegraph system ensures interested, associated parties can keep in swifter contact.

In game terms, this is the equivalent of your cell phone and your truck or transport target, and even in our early glimpse at the mission progression you'd be hard pressed to notice significant structural differences between this 100-year hence western setting and one lauded Liberty City. Yes, it's an open world, split into three areas: Frontier, Mexico, and The North. Saddle up your horse and prepare for a road trip. (Horses will have various skills and temperaments, but no confirmation on whether you can stable them to truly allow a "horses for courses" strategy to your mission selection.)

You play James Marston, described as a partially reformed outlaw who has made a life for himself in a homestead on the frontier with a wife and child. That family sounds like the ideal motivational tool should anything untoward



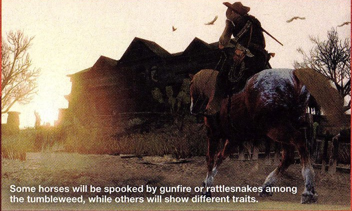
Rifles are more accurate at longer ranges, but it's still no slam-dunk to slug a guy.

Pays to play

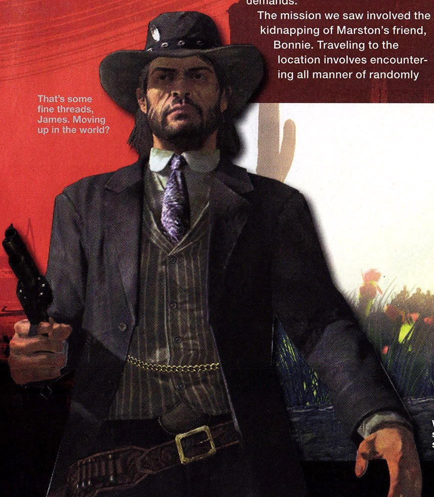
You'll need cash to buy equipment (like ammo) and can earn it through missions, and also in mini-games. No western setting would be complete without the shady card game. We also saw a timed-event mini-game involving sticking a knife between your fingers—you know the one, punctuated by a sickening and painful slicing sound if you mistime your button press and stab yourself!

befall them. We don't have any confirmation that their role is big or small in the whole scheme of things, but you know it's not a plot point that will simply sit in the background. What we do know is that a fledgling law enforcement agency has formed called the Bureau. Though ostensibly keeping the peace, its agents use similar tactics as the outlaw gangs from which it theoretically protects the citizenry. This Bureau approaches Marston with an ultimatum he simply can't refuse, throwing him back out into the lawless lands where his outlaw background will now be used for whatever the Bureau demands.

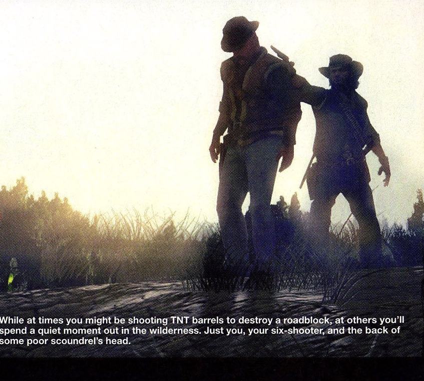
The mission we saw involved the kidnapping of Marston's friend, Bonnie. Traveling to the location involves encountering all manner of randomly



Some horses will be spooked by gunfire or rattlesnakes among the tumbleweed, while others will show different traits.

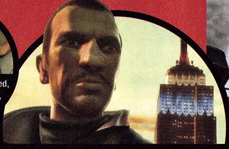


That's some fine threads, James. Moving up in the world?



While at times you might be shooting TNT barrels to destroy a roadblock, at others you'll spend a quiet moment out in the wilderness. Just you, your six-shooter, and the back of some poor scoundrel's head.

Deadwood Hard-edged, gritty, grimy, gruesome, and gorgeous.



Grand Theft Auto Open world. Strong lead character. Moral dilemmas to address. Stores to rob. Horses to jack… Wait, what's that? So the location may have changed, but from a development and design perspective expect multiple characters with their own stories and motivations.

Yosemite Sam Rabbits are among the critters roaming the wilderness. Don't like wabbits? Join the club. But in *Red Dead Redemption* you'll be able to take out every frustration by popping the local fauna.

You'll guard trains, attack trains, attack the bandits attacking trains, and probably ride on trains to take you from the dusty Frontier to the greener pastures of The North.

Made in the U.S. of A.

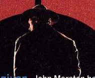
As a developer, when you set a game in the frontier west of the early 1900s, it provides one clear, simple competitive advantage. No other studio has traversed the same territory. It's not constrained by any creative handcuffs from "those other guys'" efforts, and presents an open playground to be crafted in the image Rockstar San Diego sees fit. True, but we've all likely seen the movies, so will we get the west of *Three Amigos* or *Tombstone?*

PS3 | P

The Magnificent Seven Whether it's Hollywood hard men Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, or James Coburn (or the others), this gang of gunslingers will provide inspiration for anyone who deems it cool and acceptable to fight with your supposed buddies, and take on the law of the land.

Stagecoach Robbing, chasing, or plain escorting stagecoaches should be part of the national pastime. John Ford's seminal movie? You can bet all you want the developers have this on their Netflix list.

True Grit We think it's part of the U.S. Constitution, but we're not taking any chances. Any mention of the old west absolutely requires recognition of *True Grit* (starring legendary icon John Wayne in his prime).



Unforgiven John Marston has a wife and a child, apparently. Maybe even a homestead at which you could stable your horses for specific courses. All of that is still to be revealed, but if you had a hankering to put your sweaty feet in the hardened leather boots of one Clint Eastwood, maybe this is the western you'd think about.

generated events. Bandits can rob stagecoaches. A horse may bolt from its owner, leaving him stranded. Mountain lions can attack a traveler. A vigilante mob might string up a suspect whose guilt or innocence is entirely unclear. You can interact with any, all, or none of these events, but their very presence adds context to the setting and depth and options to every moment you spend in the world.

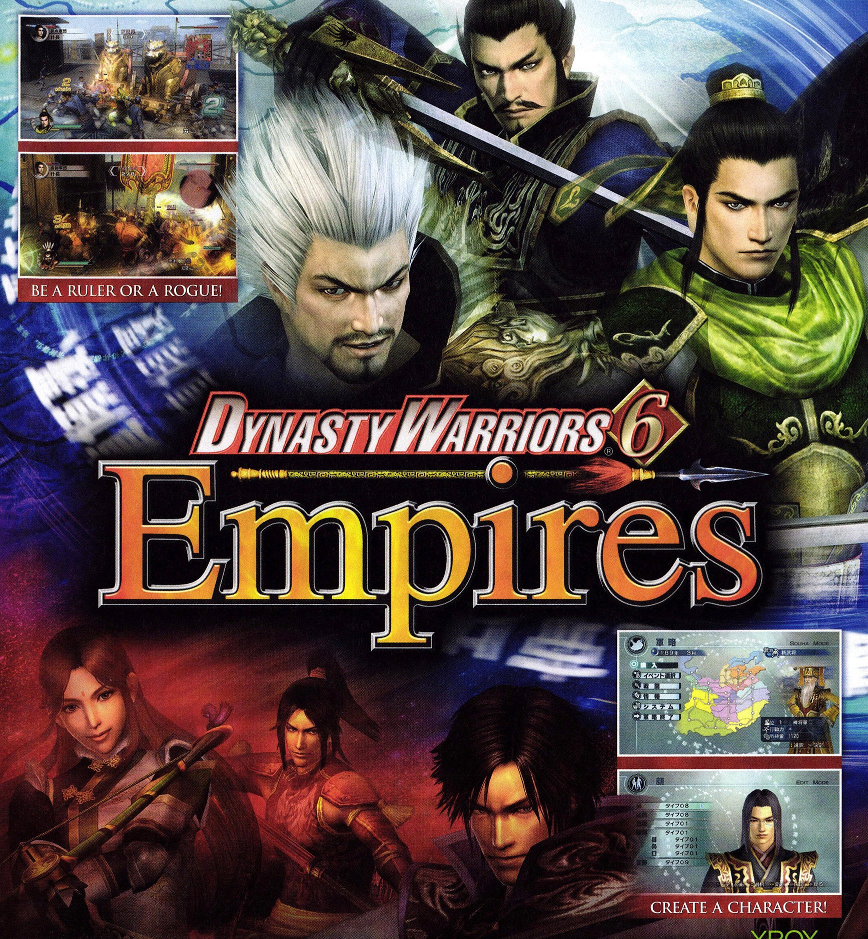
Dead to rights

Once you've located the kidnap gang, the assault begins. Marston's weapons include his pistol and rifle, and also a lasso, knife, and even Molotov cocktails. Shooting enemies builds up his Dead Eye meter, which is a trigger for a slo-mo mode to specify target locations for your bullets, and then they're fired off in rapid succession for an impressive takedown. In practice, this could ensure headshots against horse-riding assailants, hitting multiple enemies in an open town shootout, or even dropping the runaway horses pulling a carriage whose occupants you may want to meet. (Yeah, this is the wild west where horses are as vulnerable as the bandits, though it still feels a bit weird to see them killed).

Bonnie's captors have spared little time in stringing up the presumably innocent friend. One captor kicks away the stool to leave her hanging from the neck and time is ticking. Now you can either shoot the rope (though even the rifle isn't pinpoint accurate from distance) or run to her location, take out the bandit, and cut her down. Options, decisions, and a variety of tools to execute whatever strategy you decide upon…sound familiar?

How you react to these situations, what side you take on the random encounters will impact a reputation standing within the broader community, though how this works and what it actually means is still to be revealed. Also in the "to be revealed" section is any detail on the multiplayer plans, though the mode is confirmed, and you have to think that outlaw gangs facing off against each other in territorial gunfights provides tons of near-persistent world potential.

So while questions remain about the details of *Red Dead Redemption's* gameplay the essence appears to take key design ideals from *GTA* and blends them with a new setting in a new time period. It looks incredibly sharp, and we're hopeful of the kind of production value in voice acting and dialogue that helped shape Niko Bellic's world to such a believable, living, breathing setting. We'll know more in the coming months. **Rob Smith**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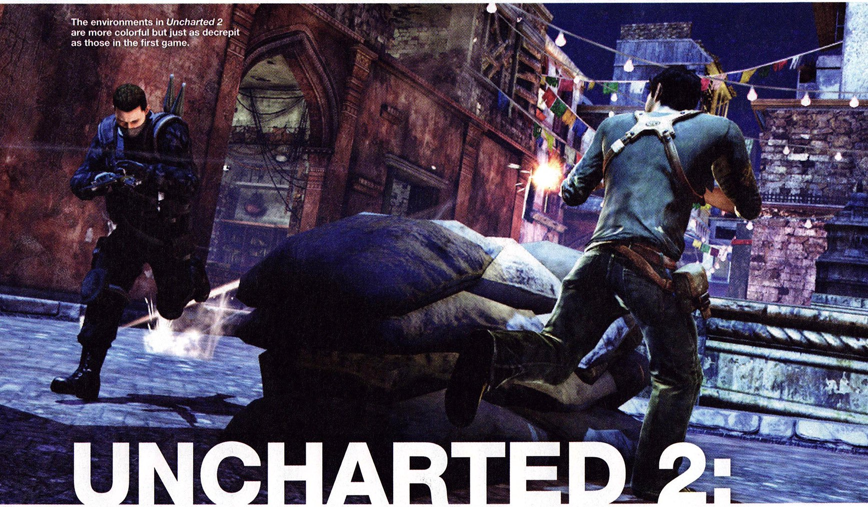


The environments in *Uncharted 2* are more colorful but just as decrepit as those in the first game.

UNCHARTED 2: Among Thieves

PS3 | P

Handsome, roguish Drake now plays with *friends*

PS3 AVAILABLE: Late 2009 GENRE: Action-Adventure PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Naughty Dog

Evan Wells, Co-President of Naughty Dog, says the goal of the *Uncharted* series hasn't changed. "We want to create a game that captures the feel of a blockbuster action movie that's got it all: great story, interesting characters, and non-stop action." The second installment of the action-adventure franchise is prepping for a holiday release, so I talked with Wells and Justin Richmond (Multiplayer Designer) to find out how well this plan remains on target.

Dexterous gunplay

"We want to top *Uncharted* one," shouts Wells above the sound of a dozen screens displaying *Uncharted 2.* "We want to tell an even more engaging story. We added more diversity to enemies, worked on the difficulty tuning, added more variety to the way in which you encounter enemies. We opened up Drake's moveset so he can attack while traversing. Whether he's hanging from a wall or swinging on a rope, he can take his gun out and shoot at enemies."

"He can pull people from around corners and rip people off ledges," Wells continues. "He can drop down on people from above. We've put in more ways he can climb through environments. He's got more animations now, so he's not just leapfrogging from edge to edge. It'll have a much more analog feel."

Okay, now I have to ask: can you shoot while jumping? (I realize I never even tried in the first game. I just assumed it couldn't be done.)

Multiplayer Designer Justin Richmond explains as someone hands him a Coke, "You'll pull your gun out and start shooting, but you can't aim. You're blind-firing. Really, you can shoot anytime. The only time you *can't* shoot is if you're…no, that's not true. You can shoot *anytime!*"

Sneaky Drake

"We've added an action-stealth component," Wells says. "In the first game, you were on the defensive. In this game, *you're* going to approach enemies and they'll be unaware. Maybe halfway through the setup, they'll know you're there, but by then, you can pick them off."

"The way enemies fight back has changed the way Drake can approach them," Wells continues, his big hand gestures illustrating his own excitement. "When he encounters an enemy with a shield, he has to get behind him or use a grenade or just pump bullets at the shield, which actually knocks the shield guy down, which lets Drake run up and

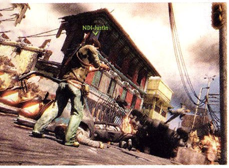
YAY, MONIES!

Across all three modes—single-player, competitive, and cooperative—you'll earn currency for performing well. Spend it on unlockable concept art, wallpapers, *or* purchase upgrades that will tangibly help you play the game. Goodies differ depending on mode.

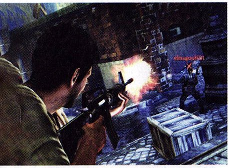
CO-OP: Pay to level up your guns.

COMPETITIVE: Buy "booster" packs and bring up to two with you into battle. Examples: increased aim accuracy on long guns, increased ammo clip on long guns, increased damage to breakable objects, quieter run speed.

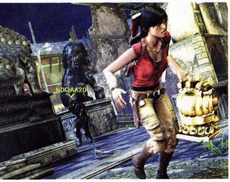
SINGLE-PLAYER: It's a secret!



In the co-op mode, treasures will drop from some enemies.



To get to this sniping position, you'll have to climb (yes, you'll be exposed).



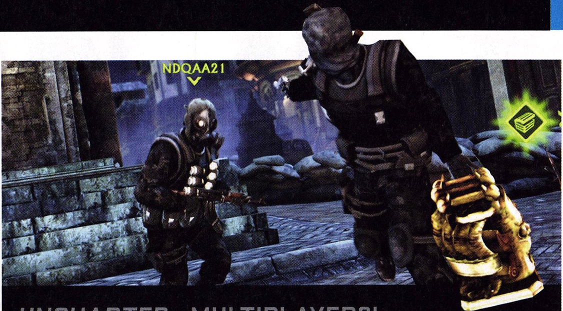
Hey! Whatever happened to that Elena chick from the first game...?

leap over, using the shield as a diving board to get behind him, and then take him out from behind."

But that's not all. Wells keeps talking, "Then we've got different classes of enemies. Before, you could pound on the attack button to take your enemies out. But now, there are enemies where, if you do that, they're going to counter you and put you in an arm bar or head lock. At which point you have to hit the counter button in order finish the combo and take them out."

I can tell Wells and Richmond have more to say about the single-player, but the star of tonight's event is the newly announced multiplayer, so they deflect the rest of my questions and focus solely on that.

Teresa Dun



UNCHARTED...MULTIPLAYER?!

Yes, you read that right. *Uncharted 2* will have multiplayer modes. Not just one, but *two:* competitive and cooperative. Multiplayer Designer Justin Richmond explains, "We wanted the multiplayer to be similar to the single-player experience, with epic moments and climbing. So we have special environment kills. If you're hanging on a ledge and a player is in front of you, you can pull them over the ledge to their death. If the player standing above sees it coming, *he* can kick you off the ledge and kill *you.* You can sneak up behind players and break their neck with a one-hit kill." *Awesome.*

Competitive Mode

Up to 10 players can play in *Uncharted 2's* competitive multiplayer mode, though the games will *all* be team-based.

PTOM: What are some of the different competitive modes?
EVAN WELLS: We're only talking about two, but there will be many, many modes. There's five-on-five team deathmatch. Then, there's Plunder, which is inspired by Capture the Flag, but with an *Uncharted* twist. You have to physically pick up the treasure and carry it with you. Because of that, you no longer have your two-handed weapons. You only have your pistol.

To get the treasure from one end of the map to the other, you frequently have to go up ledges. You'll have to work as a team, so the guy carrying the treasure will just throw it up the ledge, almost like creating a little fire brigade, for your teammate to pick it up.

Will the different game modes be customizable?
JUSTIN RICHMOND: Yeah, a few of them. We felt that weapon balance was so important that we didn't want people to mess with that. But we'll have different variants that allow you to start with a certain weapon, but then everyone gets that same weapon.

So who will you be able to play as?
JR: You'll be able to pick from many, many skins. Characters from this game and the first game, but they all play exactly the same—same run speed, same health, same hit boxes, same collisions. We didn't want people picking one person over another because they saw an insane advantage.

In that case, will there be different classes in competitive mode?
JR: Again, they're all the same. Everybody has the same exact starting budget, same exact stats. We want to have the player decide how to utilize the many different weapons in the environment.

So what makes this *"Uncharted?"*
JR: We made sure our level design felt like *Uncharted,* with a lot of verticality, sniping points, cool little hidden places. There's always stuff to climb on, to go under, in, or out. Oh, and in the Village map, it's pouring rain so it's a little bit harder to see.

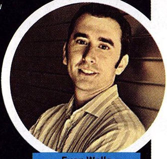
Will there be vehicles?
EW: None that you'll man yourself, but we do have environmental hazards. In the Plaza map—which is a city that's under attack by civil war—there's a helicopter flying overhead, raining machine gun fire and launching missiles. Whoever's in its path is going to be taken out. So if you hear it coming, you've got to take cover.

Are environments completely destructible?
EW: No, but there are a lot of destructible elements. Cover can be destroyed, and certain walls. There might be a wall that's intact and the helicopter takes it out, which creates a different path for you to go through.

Cooperative Mode

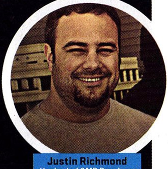
Three players take control of Drake, Sully, and newcomer Chloe in an online cooperative mode.

PTOM: Is this the same as the single-player campaign?
JUSTIN RICHMOND: No, cooperative mode is completely different. You'll see similar locations, but now it's a whole new thing. You'll need a teammate to boost you up. You'll need a teammate to take a different path to get to a door that you need to get through. If you go out alone during cooperative mode, you're going to end up getting killed.



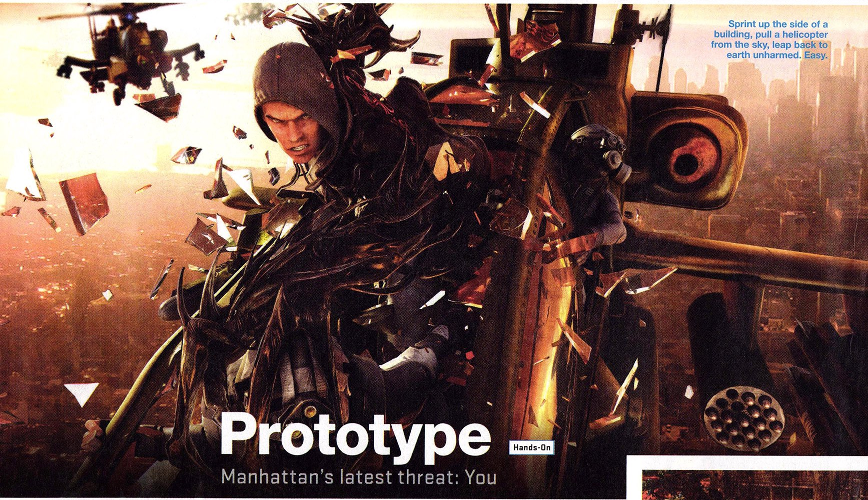
Evan Wells
Co-President, Naughty Dog

So, how will it work?
JR: There's a bunch of different maps. Each map is about 20 minutes of gameplay. Then we have various levels of difficulty and other things to extend that experience.



Justin Richmond
Uncharted 2 MP Developer

Since it's not the same as the single-player experience, why would people want to play co-op (besides hanging out with friends)?
JR: You'll see things that you won't see in the single-player game. Enemies will behave differently. There'll be specific classes of enemies that *only* exist in the co-op mode, like a grapple guy who holds you from behind and another player has to rescue you. We have a down state where players can pick you up off the ground and heal you. When enemies come at you, they're going to be tougher than they are in the single-player campaign.
EW: You'll also have access to new weapons. We have these enemies that come in with these huge Gatling guns. You take them out, then you can pick up their gun and use it. But when you're carrying that, you can't jump or melee. It's a trade-off.



Sprint up the side of a building, pull a helicopter from the sky, leap back to earth unharmed. Easy.

Prototype

Hands-On

Manhattan's latest threat: You

PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Open-world Action PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment

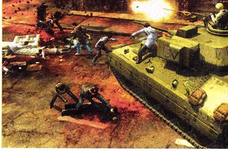
Giant claw hands to cleave innocent pedestrians in two. Bulky hammer fists to clobber tanks down 5th Avenue. Spikes that erupt beneath—and skewer—unsuspecting soldiers. A gymnast's balance to ski along a stretch of tarmac using somebody's face as a fleshy skateboard. These are just a few of Alex Mercer's key abilities, the tools he uses to negotiate a vision of New York—a city under siege.

Entire sections of the iconic city are locked down by the military. Behind their barriers an inhuman, infected threat rages while elsewhere the population attempts to maintain its daily routine—and to ignore the occasional sight of Mercer gliding from rooftops and scything through some well-dressed businessmen.

Prototype is utter chaos, bottled and burnt to a disc. The gore here is shocking, actually shocking—the sort that makes you shudder and visibly wretch. Mercer takes the "anti-hero" label to some incredibly dark limits in his attempt to unravel the mystery of why he's woken up as this shape-shifting-experiment-gone-rogue. He takes sides on a whim and can literally absorb the appearance and abilities of those around him, which both advances the story (see sidebar) and grants him new abilities.

Absorbing the body of a pilot grants you the memories and skills of your victim: how to rewire a plug, how to bleed a radiator, and most importantly, how to unleash a barrage of high-explosive ordnance from a helicopter gunship into a crowded Broadway intersection. It's with these toys and smarts you'll end up doing the most damage, and potentially having the most fun.

Evolution points are awarded for completing tasks and absorbing characters into your genetic code, and these can be spent in Mercer's skill tree. This wide, branching network of potential abilities offers new powers, upgrades to currently owned powers, and enhancements to your basic abilities such as parkour-style running, jumping, and gliding. The point is to ensure that you feel like an unstoppable force of nature, a one-man walking (or sprinting) super-weapon.



Nab a tank if you need something blown up in a hurry.

The challenge arrives when the world gets wise to your strength. Individual soldiers are fodder for your unfettered rampaging, but encounter them in groups and now you've got a problem. At times like these, when Mercer's powers just can't cut it against infected behemoths, you'll be able to rely on your ability to wield other weapons. Not just the guns and rocket launchers carelessly discarded by eviscerated soldiers, but armored tanks and helicopter gunships.

After a bit of hands-on time, we say definitively that Mercer is a deliriously empowering character to control, and that *Prototype* is shaping up to be a fun and relentless open-world gore-fest.

Steve Hogarty

PS3 | P

A Truly Absorbing Storyline

Snippets of your past are revealed through short video clips upon absorbing the memories of certain characters in the game world: low-ranking soldiers who've overheard talk of nefarious goings-on, high-ranking conspirators who green-lit morally dubious projects, or perhaps even the hospital workers and scientists who oversaw the experiments. You never quite know who's in the loop. Each of the characters you absorb appears as a node on what developer Radical is calling the Web of Intrigue: a network of linked characters with memories pertaining to your past. Each memory that Mercer absorbs will highlight the locations of a few more related memories, which you're free to hunt down and discover at your leisure.

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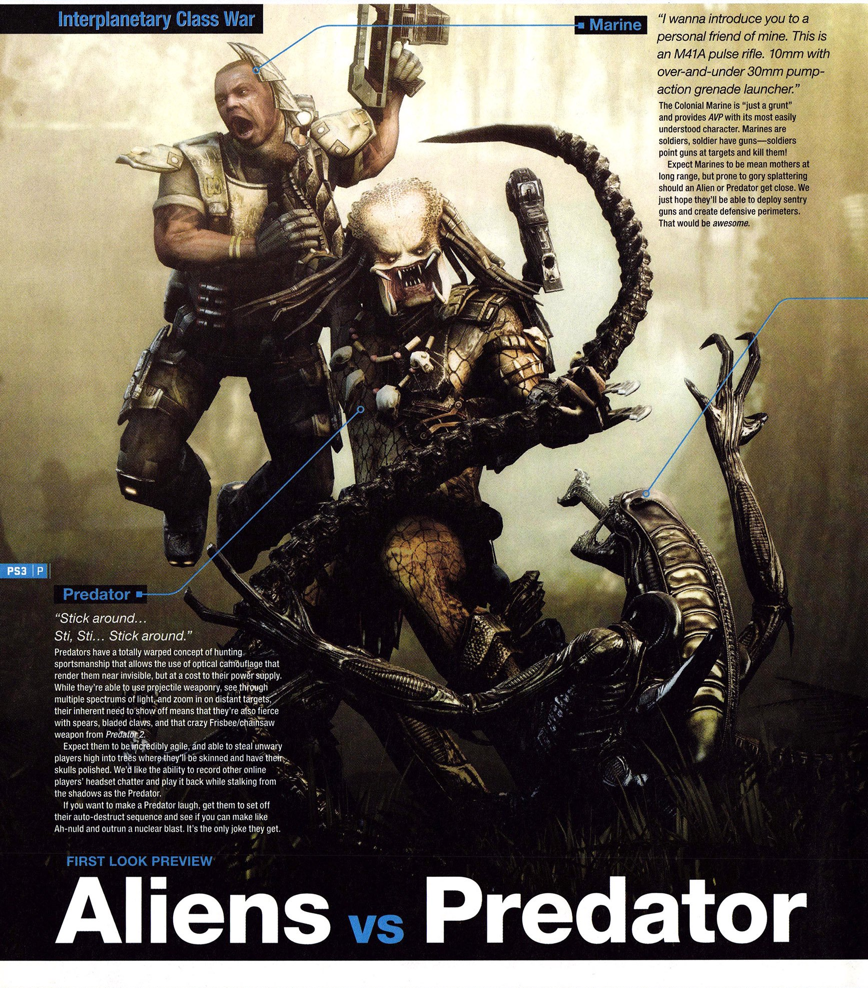


Interplanetary Class War

Marine

"I wanna introduce you to a personal friend of mine. This is an M41A pulse rifle. 10mm with over-and-under 30mm pump-action grenade launcher."

The Colonial Marine is "just a grunt" and provides *AVP* with its most easily understood character. Marines are soldiers, soldier have guns—soldiers point guns at targets and kill them!

Expect Marines to be mean mothers at long range, but prone to gory splattering should an Alien or Predator get close. We just hope they'll be able to deploy sentry guns and create defensive perimeters. That would be *awesome.*

PS3 | P

Predator

*"Stick around...
Sti, Sti... Stick around."*

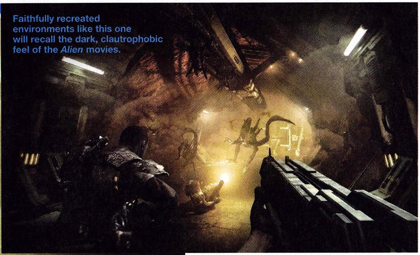
Predators have a totally warped concept of hunting sportsmanship that allows the use of optical camouflage that render them near invisible, but at a cost to their power supply. While they're able to use projectile weaponry, see through multiple spectrums of light, and zoom in on distant targets, their inherent need to show off means that they're also fierce with spears, bladed claws, and that crazy Frisbee/chainsaw weapon from *Predator 2.*

Expect them to be incredibly agile, and able to steal unwary players high into trees where they'll be skinned and have their skulls polished. We'd like the ability to record other online players' headset chatter and play it back while stalking from the shadows as the Predator.

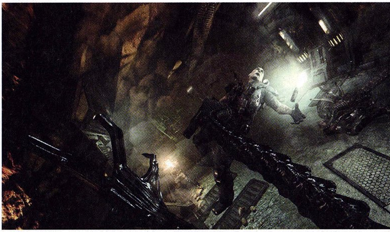
If you want to make a Predator laugh, get them to set off their auto-destruct sequence and see if you can make like Ah-nuld and outrun a nuclear blast. It's the only joke they get.

FIRST LOOK PREVIEW

Aliens vs Predator



Faithfully recreated environments like this one will recall the dark, claustrophobic feel of the *Alien* movies.



Despite acid blood and tail whips, the Alien has always been the easiest class to kill. But you can use face-hugger inseminated humans to gain extra lives.

You tell the Marines that they're not even mentioned in the title

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Late 2010 **GENRE:** First-person Shooter **PUBLISHER:** SEGA **DEVELOPER:** Rebellion

"Artistically, there have obviously been massive steps made in the last decade," says developer Jason Kingsley. He knows what he's talking about because he founded Rebellion in 1991 to produce *Aliens Versus Predator* for the Atari Jaguar. On a system drowned in shoddy product, 1995's *AVP* stood out because it showed *Doom* lovers that the FPS could be far more than a mere shooting gallery with eyes-of-the-killer attitude.

Spin on 10 years and we've witnessed two enjoyably bad *Aliens Vs. Predator* movies, a slew of comics, a PC sequel to Rebellion's original *AVP* and still, fans want more. They want *Aliens Versus Predator,* the new PS3 shooter that's morphing into a top-shelf FPS for 2010, and those fans want *AVP* the way they remember it.

According to Kingsley, "From a gameplay perspective, it's not just about what the hardware allows us to do, but the shift in gamer expectations over the years. This will not only be the easiest *AVP* game to play, but it will also allow players to get the most from each species."

Aliens, Predators, and Marines will form three distinct character classes, just like in previous generation games, and each has their own unique style of slaughter slicked via modern gaming technology. "The Marine has the standard USCM [Colonial Marines] kit you would expect, with a pulse rifle, shotgun, lots of flares. The Predator has his wrist blades, so we've worked hard to ensure that close quarters melee for him is key. Naturally, the Predator has a few more toys at his disposal that fans will recognize from the films and previous games," Kingsley hints.

"The Alien *is* a weapon; the key to success is taking advantage of this creature's abilities and getting to the right place before attacking. In many ways it helps a lot that each species is so different from the others that it allows us to create great rock-paper-scissors balancing for them."

Alien perspective

AVP's storyline has a single arc but can be experienced from the perspectives of each of the three species. The Alien player gets to witness events right from the start, while the Marine and Predator join in the narrative a few weeks later in the timeline with the three story paths converging and concluding together. The story will dovetail directly with the *Alien* franchise films, too. "There are plenty of film connections and we dig deeper in to the origins of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation and add more detail about their methods, interests, and motivations. The game itself is set on a new planet about 30 years after *Aliens.* As the Colony dug for minerals they discovered ancient ruins that immediately caught the attention of Weyland-Yutani, who began a more thorough exploration of the planet. After seven years, the company found what they were looking for, but couldn't contain it…"

Sega is so confident that Rebellion's game will maximize kickass in all directions that it's held back the release of Gearbox Software's *Aliens: Colonial Marines* until after *AVP's* release. "The previous *AVP* games are important milestones in Rebellion's gaming history," says Kingsley, "and we still have team members who worked on both of the original titles. Both games innovated so many things, and we've seen many of them copied by other games over the years. However, we always had many more ideas, but were limited by the hardware of the time. Now, we're able to push things far further than before."

Next year, you'll be leaping from tree-to-tree and branch-to-branch as the Predator. The Marines skulking below won't know what hit them as you pounce and take them back into the trees. Or will you be the alien, clinging from a ceiling, whose tail whip strikes and pierces a Predator's chest with surgical precision? Or are you the Marine, facing off against your worst nightmares armed with guns and guts alone? As Private Hudson said in *Aliens,* "That's it man, game over man, game over!"

Just be prepared to scream.

Ian Dean

Alien

"Their battle cry sounds a bit like an two-ton elephant stepping on a lion's tail."

The Alien's strength lies in its numbers, and its acid blood, and tail swipe, and mean jaws, and ability to hide, and…you get the drift. Even if you kill one face-to-face with a boom-stick your face will melt. And since they always attack at close range, Predators and Marines will try to keep them at a distance. Worst of all, they don't really want to kill you, but rather immobilize you in a cocoon to be molested by an incredibly phallic facehugger and be made the surrogate mother of yet more Aliens. The Weyland-Yutani Corporation thinks it can control and use 'em as bioweapons. Wrong.

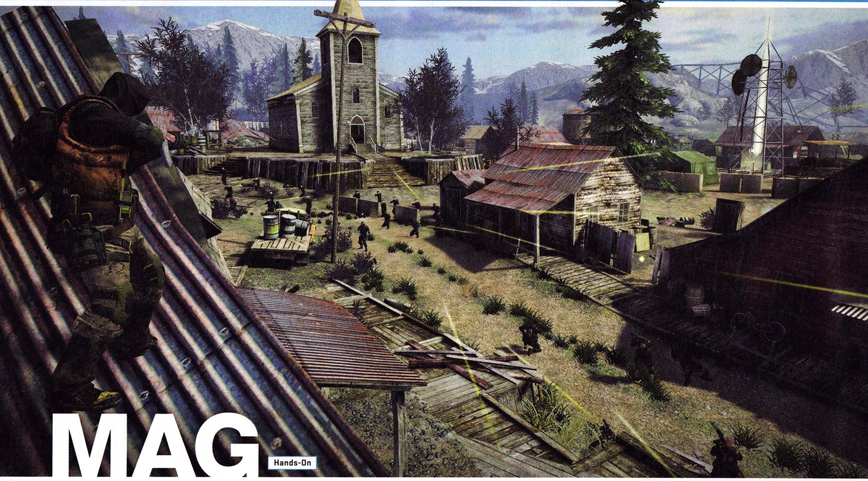
Just steal it already!

A few more things Rebellion needs to borrow from *Alien* movies.

Alien^3
Despite featuring more bald men than a Greek sauna, *Alien^3* did at least show us the Alien/dog hybrid, a reddish, fast-moving canine mash-up.

Alien Resurrection
The French slant on the fourth *Alien* movie was a stylish flop, but it did have swimming Aliens. If the new game can include this, it would rock.

Aliens Vs. Predator Requiem
This was a fun popcorn movie. It also introduced the Predator/Alien to the mix—an Alien born in a Predator to mix the species. A must.



Imagine a full-scale virtual war constantly raging on your PS3, with persistent scorekeeping and a meaningful ranking system. That's *MAG.*

MAG

Hands-On

Massive Action Game...yep, that's about right

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: Online First-person Shooter PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive

PS3 | P

War. War never changes. It does, however, get much, much bigger. Like, 256 players in a single match big. For the creators of *MAG*—a multiplayer-only first-person shooter that falls somewhere between *SOCOM: Confrontation* and *Call of Duty 4*—that number's no longer just a distant goal. It's a reality.

After spending two years developing all new server architecture and building a game engine specifically for *MAG,* Zipper Interactive—best known for creating the team-oriented *SOCOM* shooters—began conducting full-scale 256-player tests at the end of last year, proving that the game's ambitious size is technically possible and hopefully giving the developers enough time to prevent smartass game journalists from pointing out that the game's name rhymes with "lag."

Despite the name, Zipper seems confident in its technical prowess, boasting that they have not had to sacrifice quality for size and that *MAG* will run at a solid 30 frames per second. And our time with the game certainly seemed to prove them right: the environments are massive but reasonably detailed, the frame rate held up in a legitimate multiplayer match, and the draw distance let us view the entire battlefield.

Command and conquer

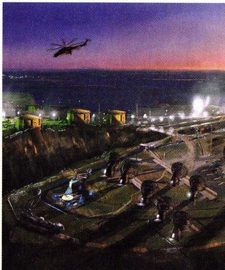
So given that *MAG* apparently can support such an exorbitant number of players, the next logical question becomes, "How do you prevent a match with so many people from devolving into total chaos?" The answer, in true military game fashion, is a basic chain of command.

Before each match, the system will automatically divide both teams into distinct eight-person squads, each with its own squad leader. In a true 128-vs.-128–player match, each team will have 16 squad leaders, four platoon leaders, and one Officer in Charge (or OIC in typical military shorthand), all of whom will be chosen by the system based on prior in-game performances (although you actually have to opt-in for leadership in order to be selected).

Team leaders still run around with a gun just like everyone else, but they'll enjoy added team-aiding abilities. All three classes passively "exude" Leadership Abilities—such as decreased reload times and greater resistance to explosives damage—that enhance the abilities of their troops. Squad and platoon leaders are able to call in Tactical Support—like mortar barrages or strafing runs—to clear targeted areas. And OICs alone are equipped with Strategic Maneuvers, which are "game changing events" like satellite sweeps that temporarily reveal the locations of all enemy soldiers.

Sir, yes sir!

The commanders' most important tool, however, is their ability to issue fragmentary orders (called frago assignments)—orders issued on the fly based on side objectives that aren't mandatory but serve a strategic purpose. In an early demonstration, we watched



MAG will support voice, text, and quick chat...which explains all these satellite dishes.

the developers break the enemy's perimeter by blowing up a gate, push them back by capturing their forward spawn point (a bunker), and disable an anti-aircraft battery, opening a friendly forward spawn point in the form of a helicopter drop.

The gate, the bunker, and the anti-aircraft gun—none of which were directly related to the team's main objective—each offered a tangible strategic gain, and thanks to fragos, the commander was able to instantly instruct his squad to tackle each objective as the opportunity arose. Of course, everything the developers blew up could be repaired and recaptured by the enemy, which should create a strong push-and-pull dynamic on the battlefield and allow players to have a truly noticeable impact on the overall fight.

But why would anyone follow a frago assignment? Since when do we listen to strangers on the Internet? In a word, incentives. In addition to being an effective game strategy, you'll gain extra experience by completing officer-designated objectives and contributing to the team. Also, following orders will strengthen a commander's Leadership Abilities, which in turn boosts the gameplay perk you receive from your commander. Follow orders, get more experience and greater benefits—simple.

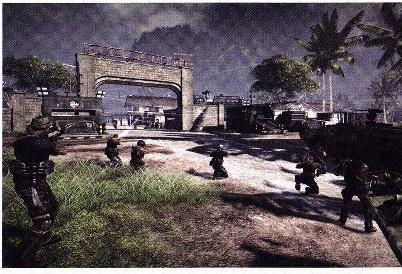
Of course, you can always lone wolf it too and gain experience by simply eliminating enemies, healing teammates, and repairing certain objects. Oh, and just so you know, ranking up will earn you new equipment, but it won't turn you into a statistical superman. So new players won't be playing a frustrating catch-up with their more experienced comrades-in-arms.

On the frontlines

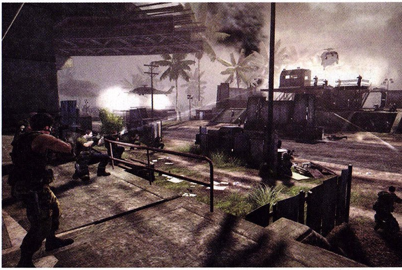
Although we weren't able to step into the boots of a squad leader, we were able to put *MAG's* gameplay to the test in a quick hands-on session. For the most part, it's about what you'd expect from a vaguely real-world military shooter: it's not quite hyper-realistic—as characters sustain an arcade level of damage and brush off a couple shots to the chest like they're nothing—but movement feels realistic and the weaponry is standard military fare.

You can tuck your weapon and sprint, heal yourself and teammates with a spray, and revive the nearly-dead before they bleed out and have to respawn. All ground vehicles are pilotable, including tanks and armored transport carriers. You can drive, ride along, or man gun turrets. Impressively, everything that happens in *MAG* is player driven—meaning no scripted events and no ambient track. Every explosion you hear and every pillar of smoke you see is the result of a real player acting in the game world.

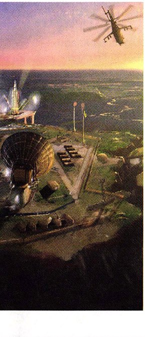
In short, hope you've got 127 good friends standing by, because this could be good. And stay tuned for more information about the upcoming beta! Scott Butterworth



Even with 256 players on the battlefield, developer Zipper promises it'll be easy to find your friends...or your clan.

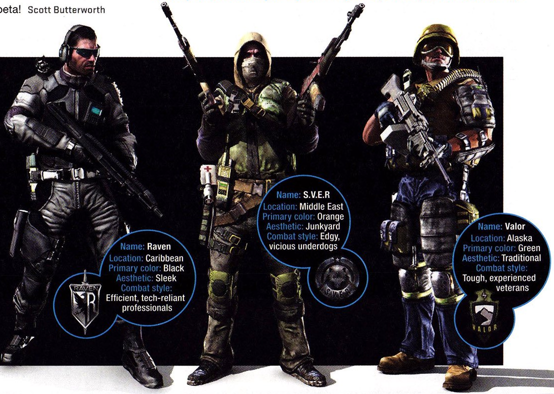


It's easy to lose track of your squad when you die, but the planned HUD will help.



Enlistment Opportunites

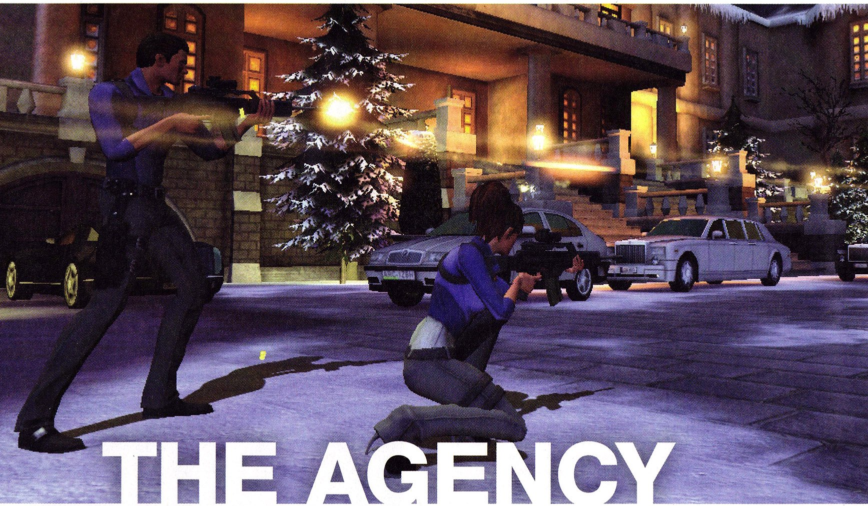
MAG's story is reminiscent of *Metal Gear Solid 4* (and other similar thematic sources): basically, the world's out of oil, everyone is mad, and the governments of the world must now rely on private military corporations to fight their wars for them. The three most powerful PMCs serve as the game's three teams: Raven, S.V.E.R., and Valor. Naturally, when you start the game, you'll pick the side that suits your tastes, customize a character (both his appearance and his equipment loadout), and start winning battles for your team...and gaining experience for yourself. Every win and loss contributes to the overall state of the world, effectively turning the game into an ongoing 24/7 tournament.



Name: **Raven**
Location: Caribbean
Primary color: Black
Aesthetic: Sleek
Combat style: Efficient, tech-reliant professionals

Name: **S.V.E.R**
Location: Middle East
Primary color: Orange
Aesthetic: Junkyard
Combat style: Edgy, vicious underdogs

Name: **Valor**
Location: Alaska
Primary color: Green
Aesthetic: Traditional
Combat style: Tough, experienced veterans

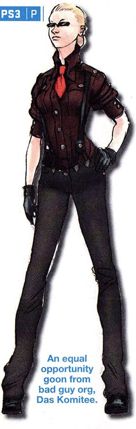


THE AGENCY

This preview will self-destruct in 30 seconds

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010 GENRE: Online Action/Shooter PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment Seattle

PS3 | P



An equal opportunity goon from bad guy org, Das Komitee.

Good evening, agent. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to investigate the massively multiplayer espionage of *The Agency.* This is Sony Online's lighthearted action-shooter that promises to let you "live the life of an elite agent" in a persistent online environment. You'll be required to build not only a personalized super spy but also your very own intelligence agency.

First, you must choose your parent organization: U.N.I.T.E. or ParaGON. U.N.I.T.E. represents the slick, sophisticated side of spying; it's tuxedos, martinis, and gadgets all the way. ParaGON, on the other hand, consists of tough-as-nails mercenaries who aren't afraid of a fight or a fifth of whiskey. If U.N.I.T.E. is James Bond, ParaGON is Jack Bauer.

As you might expect, the two sides experience different (though loosely parallel) storylines and exercise subtly different approaches to missions. While U.N.I.T.E. strides through the front door disguised as a party guest, ParaGON might enter through the side posing as member of the wait staff.

A competition of some sort exists between the two organizations, and according to Creative Director Matt Wilson, *The Agency's* endgame is "world domination." Unfortunately, he wouldn't elaborate on what that means exactly, saying only that players would be working towards "a greater organized goal."

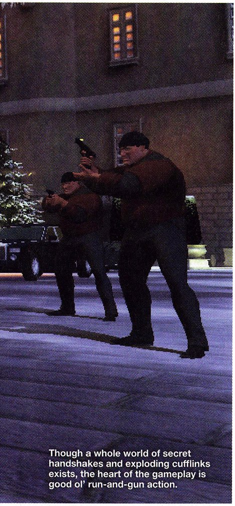
Be a team player

Once you've picked a side, you'll begin assembling your own pocket agency by collecting "operatives" who, as Designer Hal Milton puts it, are "collectible NPCs who do stuff for you. They will investigate parts of the world that you can't visit. They will try to recruit other operatives by being sent on headhunter assignments." They can also offer mission support by sniping enemies or picking locks, or they can develop weapons and technology for you by analyzing your field intel. The game contains hundreds of unique potential staffers.

"The way [your organization] is structured is, operatives come in, you decide which of them you want to add to your roster," explains Milton. "Your roster has a very limited size; it increases with your rank but think of it kind of like your deck of cards. Then you have your org chart that grows as you gain rank, adding slots that are like your hand. And the org chart is broken into Field ops, Administrative ops, Research ops, and Manufacturing ops, which makes the handy acronym F.A.R.M."

That's right, your non-playable operatives do most of your resource gathering (commonly referred to as farming) for you, conveniently eliminating one tedious facet of most MMOs. "Even though we don't make you harvest wood, our equivalent for exploring the world and gathering stuff is finding visual and physical intel," says Milton.

Once you've cobbled together a respectable team of operatives, you'll be able to create joint agencies—a code name for guilds—with other players



Though a whole world of secret handshakes and exploding cufflinks exists, the heart of the gameplay is good ol' run-and-gun action.

online, playing together and pooling your resources.

"Joint agencies are super cool," raves Milton, "because not only do they have elements of a traditional clan from a shooter, elements of a traditional guild from an MMO, they also have new actions and abilities that are exposed to them over time: operative assignment that only joint agencies [who are] sharing operatives can perform that might give a PvP smart bomb advantage for a little while, et cetera."

I, spy

Most important, of course, is the ability to create and customize a spy of your own, and Milton assured us there'd be no shortage of options. "We can't just provide 10 static weapons and outfits that you unlock that are keenly mapped to your numbers here. No, we need to provide you hundreds of options and thousands of combinations that have resultant skills, abilities, and other attribute changes that are intriguing."

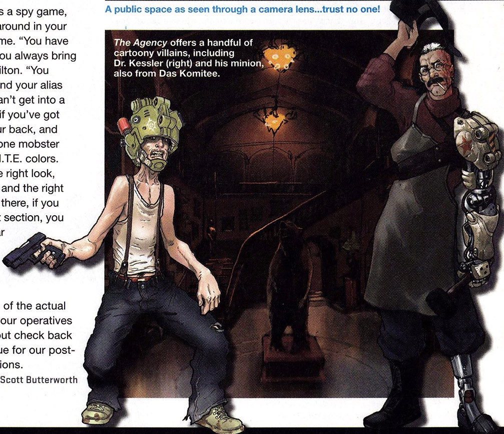
Unlike many MMOs, *The Agency* doesn't force you to choose a class when you create your character; rather, your ensemble dictates your skill set. "You are what you wear. There is no rigid class system. You do not get locked in to being a combat guy and have to re-roll to play as something else. Instead, whatever you feel like playing, put on an outfit and you'll gain experience in that role. You like blowing stuff up? Combat. Sneaking ahead? Stealth. And if you want to support your friends with traps or disabling security, you're going to want to pick a support role."

But seeing as this is a spy game, you can't simply run around in your combat gear all the time. "You have one other outfit that you always bring with you," explains Milton. "You have your role outfit and your alias outfit. Because you can't get into a nightclub or a casino if you've got a machine gun on your back, and you can't talk to that one mobster if you're flashing U.N.I.T.E. colors. You've got to have the right look, the right accessories, and the right credentials. And from there, if you make it to the combat section, you pop into your role gear and begin the rest of your assignment."

Unfortunately, we were only given a brief demonstration of the actual gameplay that all of your operatives and outfits support, but check back in our September issue for our post-E3 hands-on impressions.

Scott Butterworth

A public space as seen through a camera lens...trust no one!



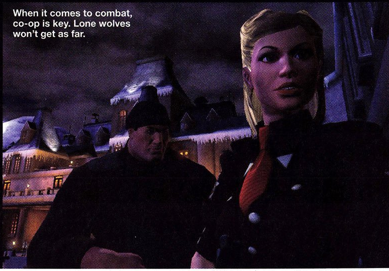
The Agency offers a handful of cartoony villains, including Dr. Kessler (right) and his minion, also from Das Komitee.

What makes *The Agency* a massively multiplayer online shooter?

Operatives, joint agencies, outfits, fine. But what about the gameplay? And what makes this an MMO? Well here's how it works: The majority of the game consists of story-driven missions. Most missions begin in non-combat public areas. Here you can collect intel, talk to NPCs, and most importantly, interact with up to 100 other players with whom you can form groups.

When you're ready, you and up to three other players can enter a private, instanced version of the same space to begin the combat portion of the mission. You *will* be able to tackle missions solo, but only at a bronze rating, which means less experience and fewer item unlocks. To achieve a gold rating, you'll need a well-coordinated group of four.

The actual gameplay ranges from *MGS*-style stealth to run-and-gun craziness—exactly what you'd expect from a goofy shooter. There will also be some PvP gameplay, but the developers insist that it will be "highly consensual" and that higher-ranking players may be better equipped than new players but will not have a statistical advantage. As they put it, "A headshot is still a headshot."



When it comes to combat, co-op is key. Lone wolves won't get as far.

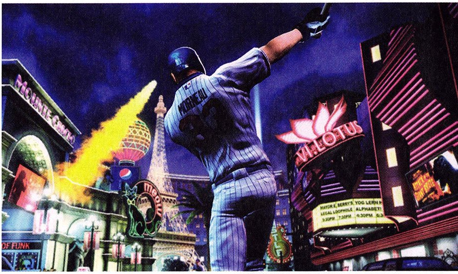
PlayStation Gallery

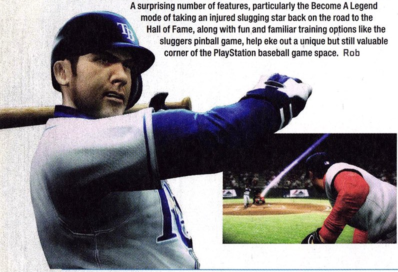
Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

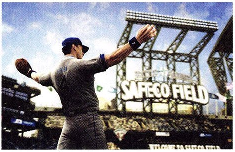
The Bigs 2 Hands-on

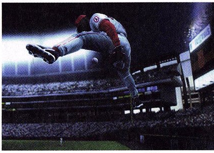
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** July **GENRE:** Sports
PUBLISHER: 2K Sports **DEVELOPER:** Blue Castle Games

Fun and frenetic, but still grounded in the core rules and traditions of our national pastime. Those are the key precepts of 2K's slugging baseball game, the stablemate to *MLB 2K9* and *Front Office Manager.* Hitting juiced(-like) home runs, performing spectacular diving catches, and throwing unhittable heaters should make any baseball fan sit up and take notice. But the arcade-style highlight reel action shouldn't disguise a solid core baseball mechanic underneath. While it's tough to be enthused by Blue Castle's track record (after the disappointing *MLB 2K8* dev duties were shifted from the studio to series stalwart Visual Concepts) maybe the more flexible dynamics will suit their engine. The introduction of a pulsing red batter's wheelhouse in the strike zone—providing a better chance for a hit, but a pitcher the chance to earn a boost if he pitches there and gets him to miss—adds strategy to the solid-looking on-field events. A surprising number of features, particularly the Become A Legend mode of taking an injured slugging star back on the road to the Hall of Fame, along with fun and familiar training options like the sluggers pinball game, help eke out a unique but still valuable corner of the PlayStation baseball game space. Rob





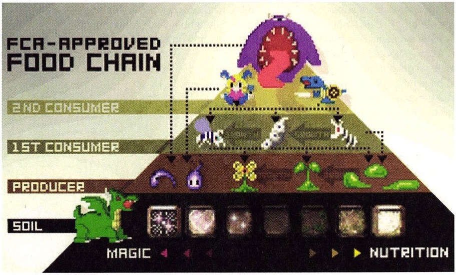


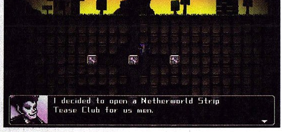


Holy Invasion of Privacy, Bad Man! What Did I Do to Deserve This? First Look

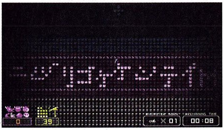
PSP **AVAILABLE:** July **GENRE:** Retro Arcade-style Strategy
PUBLISHER: NIS America **DEVELOPER:** NIS

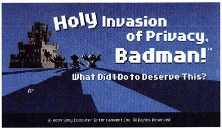
If the classic arcade game *Dig Dug* and the oddball PC title *Dungeon Keeper* went into a dank crypt-corner and had an "indiscretion," the resultant mutant offspring might be the oh-so-long-winded *Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do to Deserve This?* You oversee the excavation and upkeep of your own custom dungeon (viewed in a subterranean cross-section). The goal is to give the dungeon a monster-populated "ecosystem" that can self-sustain and can also survive the occasional incursion from the do-gooder, human heroes from the surface, bent on kidnapping your prized Overlord. Gloriously retro graphics, real-weird strategy...and the hands-down best made-in-Japan game name EVER. Chris





I decided to open a Netherworld Strip Tease Club for us men.

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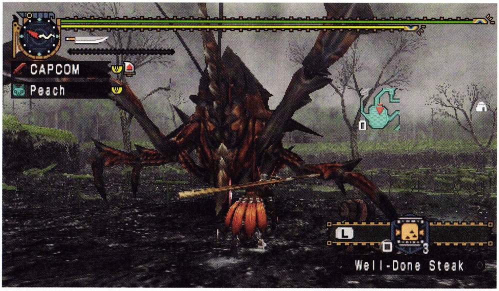
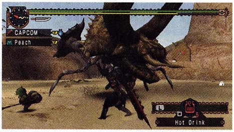
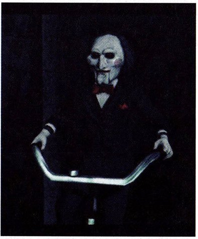


Monster Hunter Freedom Unite Hands-on

PSP AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Action-RPG
PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom



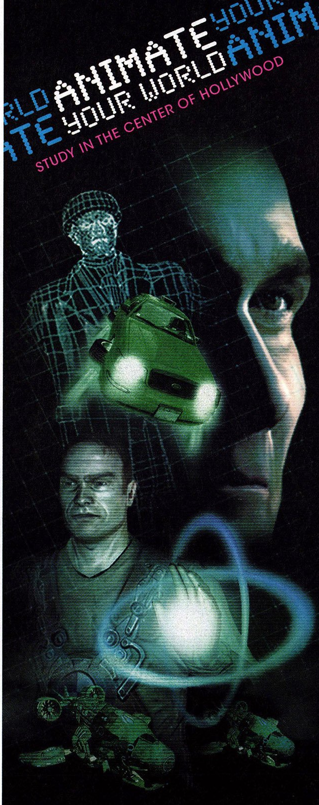
What makes the *Monster Hunter* series so ridiculously popular in Japan? Maybe it's the huge variety of creatures you can hunt, the increasingly "über" armor you can craft, or just sitting in a room joined through the ad hoc connection with three friends, hacking the limbs from dinosaurs and giant pink baboons. Whichever it is, *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite* will provide more of it. This is more of an expansion pack collecting content from *Freedom* and *Freedom 2,* but *Unite* will offer some new monsters, missions (including the insanely difficult G-rank missions), and equipment. You'll also have a Felyne companion who'll help you fight, heal, and gather items during single-player missions. The Capcom representative I talked to has already sunk 300 hours into *Unite* (and he's not a developer). Now, I just have to spend a couple dozen hours in the game to figure out whether he's insane or a genius. Teresa



SAW First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Survival Horror/Adventure
PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Konami

Thanks to a project-saving pickup by Konami, the stalled creepo game, based on the gruesome horror-movie franchise, is back on track...um, hooray? With a storyline that takes place between the first two movies, *SAW* is a third-person, action/puzzle/horror mangle-up; you take the role of detective David Tapp, kidnapped by the Jigsaw Killer. Tapp awakens (with one of those nasty, reverse bear-trap jaw-splitter rigs on his face) in an abandoned asylum—one liberally littered with numerous deadly Jigsaw-style traps; from that point on, it's A) get into Escape mode, B) deal with the other occasional damaged-goods victims unwillingly populating the nuthouse, and C) try not to die too messily in the process. *SAW* will utilize the Unreal 3 engine, and requires you to make use of weapons (at least a confirmed lead pipe, hopefully more) and to play as a number of different characters. Surprisingly, *SAW* will also offer a multiplayer feature, with the idea that you'll work together to outwit the various environment-based traps. Chris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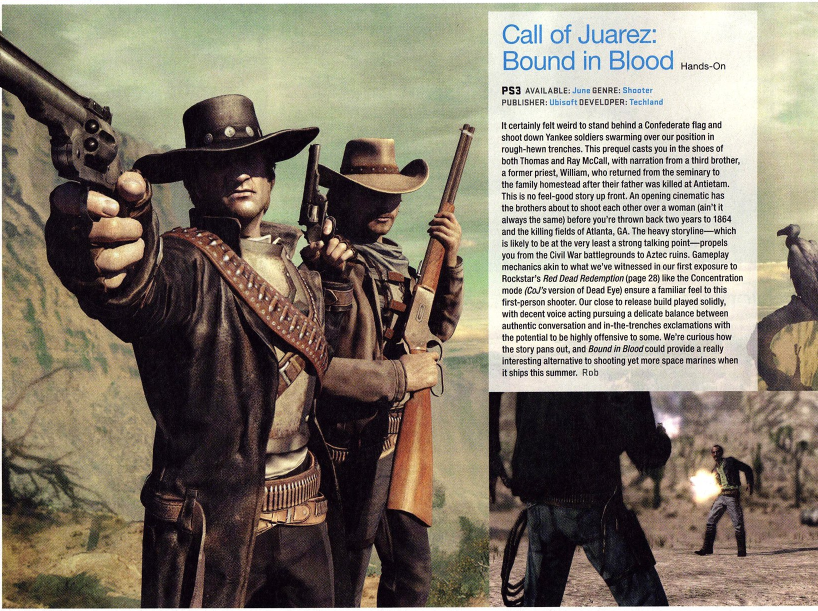


Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood Hands-On

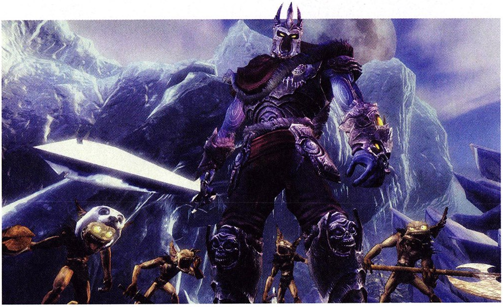
PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Shooter
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Techland

It certainly felt weird to stand behind a Confederate flag and shoot down Yankee soldiers swarming over our position in rough-hewn trenches. This prequel casts you in the shoes of both Thomas and Ray McCall, with narration from a third brother, a former priest, William, who returned from the seminary to the family homestead after their father was killed at Antietam. This is no feel-good story up front. An opening cinematic has the brothers about to shoot each other over a woman (ain't it always the same) before you're thrown back two years to 1864 and the killing fields of Atlanta, GA. The heavy storyline—which is likely to be at the very least a strong talking point—propels you from the Civil War battlegrounds to Aztec ruins. Gameplay mechanics akin to what we've witnessed in our first exposure to Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption* (page 28) like the Concentration mode *(CoJ's* version of Dead Eye) ensure a familiar feel to this first-person shooter. Our close to release build played solidly, with decent voice acting pursuing a delicate balance between authentic conversation and in-the-trenches exclamations with the potential to be highly offensive to some. We're curious how the story pans out, and *Bound in Blood* could provide a really interesting alternative to shooting yet more space marines when it ships this summer. Rob

Overlord II Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Evil Simulator
PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Triumph Studios

Kids can be mean. When I started my hands-on session with *Overlord II,* the kids in Nordberg sneered at me, a little orphan boy with an affinity for outlawed magic. (Perhaps I deserved it. I did knock over their snowmen.) But let them taunt, they soon got what they deserved. Moments later, my brown minions found me, and thus began this third-person, action-adventure, minion-controlling parody of all things fantasy. My first order of business as the aspiring Overlord? I directed my minions to the kids' secret clubhouse, had them steal and don the kids' clothes (ha, enjoy running home naked in the snow, punks!), and then made my way to the village festival. I then had my minions destroy the bright tents (and I set off a few fireworks myself), before I appropriated a catapult and blasted the town to scraps. Sweet vengeance! Besides the two new gameplay mechanics (the catapult and the minion-only missions), *Overlord II* feels similar to its predecessor in tone, controls, and art style. But I can't wait to get my hands on the final game to see what new fantasy parodies await. Teresa



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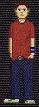

X 1

YOU HAVE ONE LIFE REMAINING

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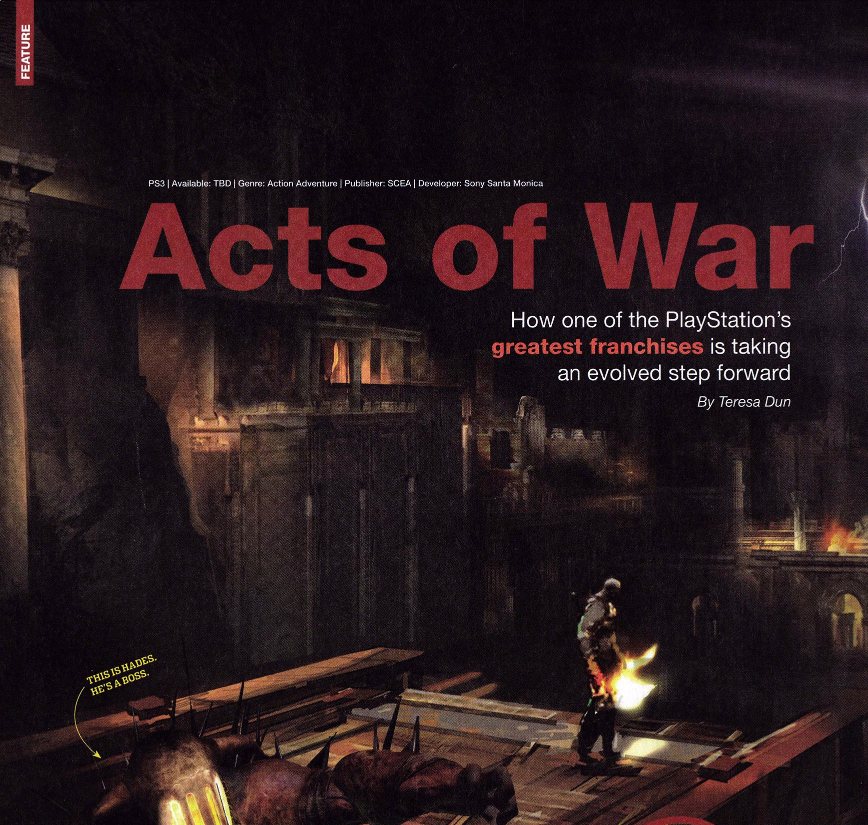
PS3 | Available: TBD | Genre: Action Adventure | Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Sony Santa Monica

Acts of War

How one of the PlayStation's **greatest franchises** is taking an evolved step forward

By Teresa Dun



THIS IS HADES. HE'S A BOSS.

WHO ARE YOU FIGHTING?

The enemies in *God of War III* are split into classes, and even the lower-tiered ones are important. (Think about it: you see grunts more often than you see bosses.) The goal is to make *every* enemy stand out, so each enemy type will have its own unique silhouette, personal look, and trademark moves.

THE BOTTOM OF THE CHAIN These lowest tiered enemies are critters, like rabid dogs, and only take a few hits to take out. They attack in packs, so it's about strategically dealing with them in groups while avoiding their dog pile attacks.

GRUNTS These guys are the most versatile characters in the game. They're skeletons, archers, and other grunt-like humanoids. They often come in large numbers and they allow you to practice your combo attacks for the harder battles.

"Three times. Maybe three times I want the player to throw the controller down out of frustration."

This is no psychology experiment testing to see how far you can push a gamer before he cracks. This is Stig Asmussen, Game Director of *God of War III,* explaining that he wants players to be frustrated when they play the epic conclusion to one of the PlayStation's most lauded action-adventure franchises.

"I remember when I was working on *God of War* one," Asmussen continues. "Dave [Jaffe, lead designer of the first *God of War]* said 'I want people to throw down the controller on this puzzle, but I want them to come back the next day, pick it up, and nail it.' And I agree. *That's* when a player really feels like they've accomplished something."

I'm talking with Asmussen after a day spent touring the Sony Santa Monica offices. After peeking at a dozen computer screens and chatting with folks from different parts of the team, I realize something no one's explicitly said: The secret behind *God of War's* success is control. The team hacks away at every tiny element—from how the light hits Kratos' bulging muscles to the textures of a marble column, from the animation of a Cyclops' jiggling belly to the way a pack of rabid dogs move—until it's perfect. They call it "polish" but really, it's control.

GoW III is crafted to be a cinematic experience. Expertly and lovingly pieced together. "Directed" the way a film is. You won't find any *Grand Theft Auto* or *Fallout 3*-style open-world elements in *God of War III,* because the fun you find on your own *might* not be as great as the fun the team can make for you.

And they're not willing to take that risk.

So they're building the experience for you, piece by piece, angle by painstaking camera angle, death animation by death animation, puzzle by frustrating puzzle. Here's what they've done so far…

What does "evolved" combat mean?

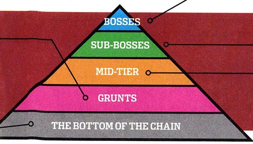
The combo-based combat in *God of War* has always been scrumptiously satisfying, so the goal in *GoW III* is to build upon that foundation to take battles to a whole new level. In the new game, when you grab an enemy (using the Circle button), you have four branches to pick from. You can punch him (press Circle again…and again…and again), rip him apart with your bare hands (Triangle), use him as a shield (Square), or chuck him at a group of enemies (X button). Already, that's impressive…but consider these juicy facts: you can seamlessly switch between branches, you can run, and you can interact with walls and cliffs.

So picture this: You've got an enemy squeezed between your hands. You can pin him to a wall (just run up to one) and repeatedly bang his face in until he's dead. *Or,* you can punch him a few times, aim him toward a crowd of oncoming skeletons, and throw him (the impact perhaps bouncing a few enemies off a wall, which causes damage, or even send them flying off a cliff edge). *Or,* you can just use him as a shield, and when you've got no more use for him, punch him a few times (because you *can)* before tearing him in half. Your choice.

The one thing you can't do while holding an enemy is jump, but that brings me to the next move: the combat grapple. Here's what Lead Combat Designer Adam Puhl has to say about it. "At any point, if there's an enemy on the ground, in the air, wherever, Kratos can throw his blades at them, pull himself into that enemy [or pull the enemy over, or toss the enemy left or right], and perform a shoulder ram. When it hits, the game slows down, so you get this impactful attack, and you can continue to combo after that."

So what will that look like in motion? "You can beat on a guy," Puhl continues, "throw him into the air, grapple up to him, juggle him a bit up there, and then kill the guy off. Then, you can throw your blades down to an enemy on the ground, and shoulder ram into him. The combat grapple is a linker for the entire combat system."

Now, imagine both the new grab mechanic and the combat grapple blending seamlessly into each other, and that's a taste of what to expect in *GoW III.* Asmussen explains the philosophy. "We wanted to make sure when you have a bunch of enemies on screen, you had options. That's one of the cool things about our grunts: later on, you start to use them as ammunition against the big guys."



MID-TIER These are the Minotaurs and Medusas from past games. You'll need to apply more logic and strategy to defeat them.

SUB-BOSSES Like the giant Cyclops and the Centaur in the trailer, these tougher enemies really draw your attention. This is where the team focuses much of their new gore technology, and the kill sequences are bound to be impressive.

BOSSES You know who these guys are! Well, no, you don't. The developers remain defiantly tight-lipped about who Kratos will encounter, but you can expect boss fights to be lengthy, difficult, multi-phased, and oh-so-sweetly satisfying.

NEXT-GEN UPGRADE

In *God of War II,* when Kratos' chains swept out they had to follow a linear path. Now, they can curve. What's that mean for us? According to Giovanni Luis (Supervisor, Technical Art Group), that means chains can actually wrap around people's necks and choke them. They call it "proprietary chain technology." I call it "awesome."

Seeing the combat in action

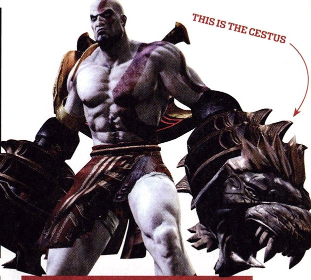
The team showed Kratos executing his new moves on a pack of 30 rabid dogs. Yes, *30* angry, half-rotting canines, each with a unique appearance and all snapping their jaws at Kratos' flesh while never clipping into each other.

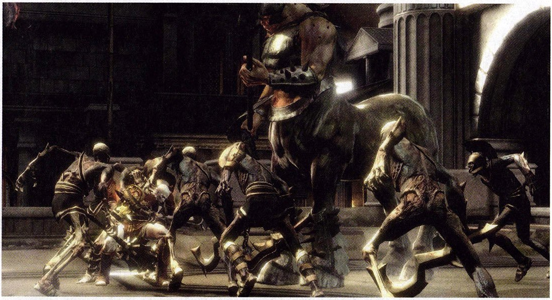
Sometimes, one of the dogs would howl and the rest would stop their attacks to join in. Then, *all* of them would charge at Kratos together, dog-piling onto him, and Kratos would burst out of them. Well, that's cool enough, but I've seen Kratos do that move before (in the *GoW III* trailer, available on the PSN). It got better when one of the dogs howled and Kratos *kicked* him into the rest of the pack before the other dogs could howl with him. That bought Kratos enough time to grab a nearby dog and punch, rip, or throw him (the camera zoomed in a bit to Kratos at that point, and all the animations looked fantastic).

I also saw Kratos roll-evading the dogs as they chased him, and the movements of the dogs as they ran as a group, one or two of them occasionally jumping out to bite at Kratos, reminded me of waves on a beach. Mesmerizing. (You can cross that one off your list, Asmussen.)

Hades is a badass

On the opposite end of the enemy spectrum is the boss Hades. The rabid dogs died in just one or two hits; Hades might take you 20 minutes, though the





The first time you encounter a group of skeletons armed with big Zeus shields, you'll need to control a Cyclops to take them out. Once you get the Cestus, however, you'll be able to attack right through their shields.

THE CESTUS

You can learn a lot about a man from his weapons. At least, that's the mentality behind the weapons design in *God of War III.* According to Lead Combat Designer Adam Puhl, each weapon will be a "modification of Kratos' character." They'll lend themselves to different gameplay strategies, and they'll *feel* unique. Partially, that's because Kratos' evades and magic (which are linked to weapons) will change depending on what he's using, but mostly it's because each weapon was designed with specific battle mechanics in mind.

There will be four main weapons in *GoW III.* You already know about the blades, which are great for wildly slashing groups of enemies from a distance. The team refuses to talk about two of the others. (Their self-discipline is amazing, because I didn't let up.) And then there's the Cestus. Ah, the powerful Cestus. Here's the low-down:

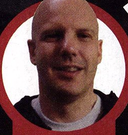
WHAT IT IS: A series of heavy rings on Kratos' arms with lion heads at the end, covering his hands. The Cestus is a big weapon that imparts a lot of force. It's great for clearing out big groups of enemies and knocking guys around.

UP CLOSE: The Cestus is mostly a close range weapon that allows Kratos to deliver "big, fat, hard, meaty hits" against a single enemy, but then the force of the blow will send out concussive energy that knocks back surrounding enemies. A good strategy is to focus your hits on the toughest enemy and let those concussive hits whittle away the lives of the other enemies.

IN THE AIR: Kratos can jump into the air, shove the Cestus downwards so the lion heads extend on their chain to ram into the floor, and knock enemies off their feet.

FROM A DISTANCE: On the ground, Kratos can send the Cestus flying along its chains, "clapping" an enemy between the two lion heads or pulling an enemy toward him so he can slam the weapon into the defenseless guy and send him soaring away.

THE ONE-TWO: If you target a single guy, you'll be able to pound him with a flurry of powerful punches with the Cestus. Pow, pow, and for good measure, pow!



ENGAGE

MESMERIZE

HYPNOTIZE

ENGROSS

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Stig Asmussen (Game Director) describes his goals for *God of War III* in four words.

team only showed me the early parts of the fight.

It started in a dark room. When Kratos swung his blades the room was illuminated for a moment and I saw a hulking shadow in the distance. Creepy. Then, suddenly, the room brightened—apparently Hades messes with the lighting to prove his control over his dominion—and Kratos and Hades stood alone in a small, circular space.

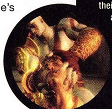
Alone? Not quite. Because along the walls were *souls,* and Hades ripped one out to fling at Kratos. When the soul missed, Hades attempted to tear Kratos' own soul out (you escape by bashing the R1 and L1 buttons, it seemed) and I saw the white outline of Kratos' "spirit" leave his body for a moment, until he tugged it back.

As revenge, Kratos tried to rip one of Hades organs from his gut. But it's not going to be that easy… While the organ did fly to the other side of the room, it tried to make its way *back* to Hades (until Kratos stopped it) as ghostly hands emerged from the ground to grab at Kratos' ankles.

At some point, one wall of the room was destroyed, so I'm guessing you'll eventually demolish the entire arena. At another point, Hades threw out chains that flew through the area, and Kratos was supposed to find the right spot to dodge it. Figuring out the mechanics of this fight could be one of those throw-down-the-controller moments Asmussen mentioned.

Immense power

The developers aren't 100-percent sure: the Titan on the screen before me is either 20 or 60 stories tall. Either way, he's *big.* It's the fire Titan that I saw in the demo a few months ago. Rivulets of lava flow across his chest, settling into little pools. He has a volcano on his back, and when he's upset, it erupts a little. He doesn't have an official name yet, but the amount of detail poured into him indicates that he's not just a background character.



In fact, Titans will play a central role in *God of War III.* You'll begin the game on the back of the Gaia Titan. As she climbs Mount Olympus for a showdown with the gods (the history between god and titan is littered with bad feelings and sworn animosity) a furious war rages all around. Think: hurling debris, an onslaught of grunts, and enraged—you might say titanic—Olympians.

While the Titan is busy dealing with gods, Kratos is battling foot soldiers while riding atop the Titan. "You're running through this dense forest," Asmussen explains. "There are explosions going on around you, but the forest is alive. The forest is moving. The forest is talking to you. You're interacting with Gaia and she's changing the mission in some places and you're changing it, too. There's this chaos that happens in war that people are familiar with, but what they're not familiar with is the world *changing* [as in, the floor suddenly becomes a wall] while you're in the thick of it."

Beyond that, the developers stonewalled every question that I asked about Titans, claiming that they don't want to spoil the surprise. Ah, even before the game's release, they're directing how players experience *God of War III.*

Colossal stages

The team did, however, show me two new areas in the game. The first was a cavernous space inside Mount Olympus consisting of rock and metal, which they've dubbed the "Labyrinth." Inside were huge blocks (big enough to house other levels inside *them)* that you'll have to puzzle out how to move into place so you can enter. They described it as "a chimney" carved inside the mountain. And the area is so massive that Kratos looked like a speck.

Inside the central part of that area was an ornately decorated bridge with something like a gazebo in the middle. Inside *that* was a flame holder. They wouldn't tell me what it's used for, but from the overly ornate statues gracing two of its sides, I can tell it's important.

The second area they showed was the "hub," and it looks like a place that the gods would hold meetings, throw parties, or greet guests. A spiral staircase, delicately painted archways, gold-trimmed moldings, majestic statues, numerous pillars—the area is large, detailed, and opulent. (For now…?) The developers hinted that it's one of the central locations in the game, which you'll return to again and again on your way to new areas. And to give you a sense of scale: one of the larger levels in *God of War II* (the palace) completely fits in just the *top* portion of the hub.

A Titan-ic effort

So Asmussen wants us to throw down our controllers out of frustration? Fine, I'll give him that, because I've seen the attention the team is giving even the smallest aspects of the game. Like, for example, two of Puhl's favorite elements of *GoW III.* "It's a small thing, but when Kratos has his blades out but is done with the fight and starts running again, he puts his blades away on his back. Or when Kratos is running or walking, he increases and decreases his momentum. His animations look different. And even with all these things, we're making effort to ensure he doesn't *feel* any different than he has in the past."

I *detest* frustration, but if the developers think that that's what it takes to give me the best *God of War III* experience, well, call me a chump (or just someone who's basing her judgment off the high caliber of the past two games), but I kind of believe them. As we ended the day, Asmussen said, "If we put a smile on somebody's face, that's a pretty neat thing."

A smile? Really? In a game with Kratos?

"Any kind of emotion that we can get from people is good, as long as it's not 'that's a really #@!& game.'" And you know, I think that's something they won't have to worry about. ■

THE NEW "ITEMS" CATEGORY

In past *God of War* games, items were linked to magic, but they'll be in their own category this time around and utilize a new "energy" bar instead of the magic bar. "Items" include secondary weapons like the Fire Bow and Helios' head.

Puhl explains the change. "In the past, when the Wind Bow was linked to the magic system, people didn't want to use it because they wanted to save their magic points for the big magic attacks instead. We wanted to offer more freedom this time, so we removed it from the magic system completely! Now it's linked to a regenerating energy bar, so you have unlimited ammo with the Fire Bow." Here's what you can do with the two announced items.

THE FIRE BOW

- Shoot it once to set a distant enemy on fire.
- If the enemy runs into other enemies, get out the marshmallow forks and get ready for a big toasting session as the fire spreads! (You can help it along by shooting more guys.)
- You'll also be able to shoot certain burnable objects. Ah, anyone ready for a puzzle?

HELIOS' HEAD

(obtained after you rip it from Helios' shoulders)

- Find "secrets." When you're near one, the controller will vibrate, you'll hear an audio cue, and perhaps an on-screen cue, as if you're "using a metal detector," according to Asmussen. Then, you "paint" the area until you find the secret.
- In dark spots, it can be used as a flashlight.
- Shine it in enemies' eyes to blind them. They'll carry the glow for a little while, so you can put the head away and quickly take them out with your main weapon.
- The "flash-bang" super-move: Charge up the Helios head and unleash a huge explosion. It won't do any damage, but it can potentially blind everyone on the screen.

ICARUS ASCENSION

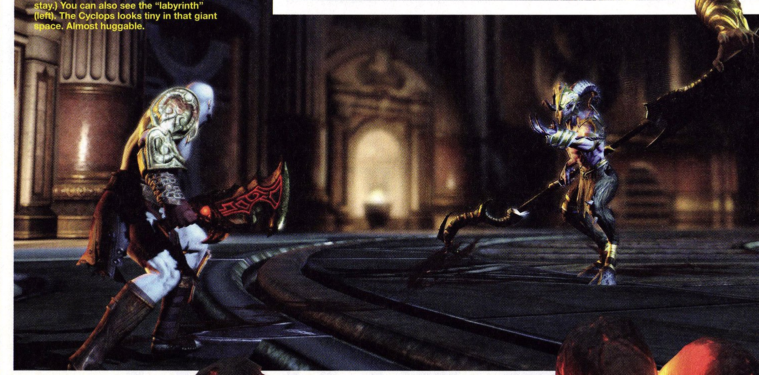
As a way to travel vertical spaces, Kratos can use his Icarus wings in a flight mini-game. "It's a lot like navigating on foot," Asmussen says, even though it's free-floating flight. "You've got your normal up, down, left, right moves using your Left-analog, but you also use an evade on your Right-analog. It's the basic dodge mechanic gameplay, where you're on the edge of your seat. It's fast and requires twitch movement."

MAGIC

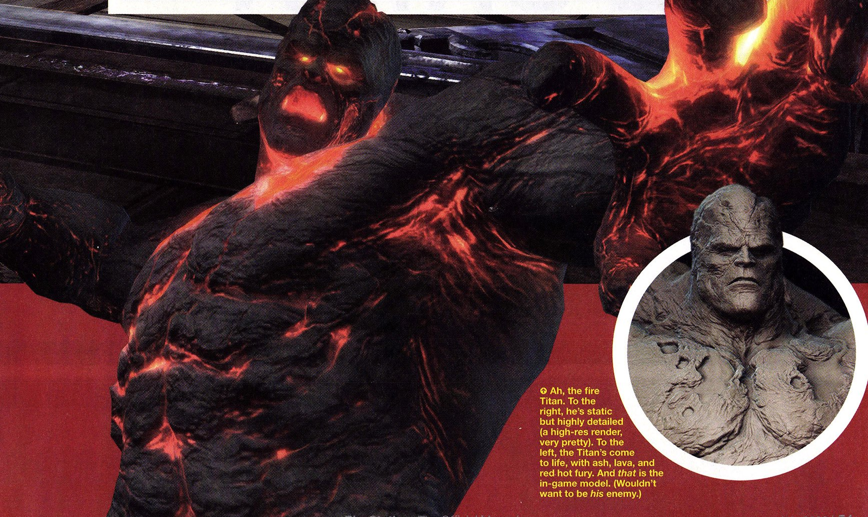
The magic in *GoW III* will be all new. Here's all that Puhl would say about it: "Just like the weapons are evolving, we're learning from stuff we've done in the previous games. [The new magic attacks] will have more gameplay. There'll be more interesting things that you can do." That's it? Not a single tangible detail? What a tease!

But then a developer I won't name let slip that one of the Cestus' (potential) magic moves: Kratos will pound the ground to send a massive wave of destruction in front of him. Oooh.

THIS IS ZEUS



This is the "hub," a location you'll pass through again and again. Notice the blood stains on the floor? (We wonder if they'll stay.) You can also see the "labyrinth" (left). The Cyclops looks tiny in that giant space. Almost huggable.



➊ Ah, the fire Titan. To the right, he's static but highly detailed (a high-res render, very pretty). To the left, the Titan's come to life, with ash, lava, and red hot fury. And *that* is the in-game model. (Wouldn't want to be *his* enemy.)

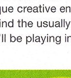
PLAYSTATION STATE OF THE UNION

THE DEVELOPERS (PART ONE)

Back in the April issue we plowed through the PlayStation 3 landscape to showcase the sheer volume of games heading to the system in the months ahead. Despite living, eating, breathing PlayStation gaming every day, it was still humbling to see the list swell to 150 games. Behind each entry was a dedicated team of coders, artists, sound engineers, designers, producers, testers, and tea ladies.

These development studios are the houses that will continue to build the PlayStation 3, but do you know what goes on behind the closed doors, among the lines of cubicles, across the open-plan desks of development studios around the country?

We quizzed principals at a large cross-section of studios, varying in size, experience, and attitude to outline the company culture that shapes the environment in which their games are made. Many were willing to divulge insight into the internal culture that sets them as a unique creative environment, so enjoy part one of a two-part peek behind the usually closed doors of the stars making the games you'll be playing in the months ahead.



INSOMNIAC GAMES

As described by Ted Price (President) and Brian Allgeier (Creative Director for *Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time*)

411

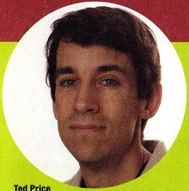
Location: Burbank, CA; Durham, NC

Year founded: 1994; 2009

# of employees: 167; 17

Studio motto: Five principles
- Independence
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Quality over Quantity
- Efficiency

Games: *Spyro* series; *Ratchet & Clank* series; *Resistance* series



Ted Price

CULTURE

Regular company events: Happy Hours, Friday lunches, Insomniac show-and-tells, title wrap-parties, ice-cream/smoothie bars, in-studio Tue./Thurs. massage therapy, company softball/basketball teams, movie outings, guest speakers, spot awards and giveaways (like PS3s), awesome holiday parties, catered breakfasts, random contests, lunch for random groups of Insomniacs, post-cards event.

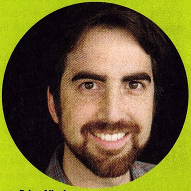
In the fridge: Cereals, breads, deli meat, yogurt, carrots, cheese, pudding, hot pockets, ice cream, fruit, chips, crackers, trail mix, soups, cookies, energy bars, beef jerky, etc. We have over 40 kinds of soda, juice, water (sparkling, still, flavored), tea and energy drinks, six types of coffee, milk (fat, non-fat, part fat, soy, chocolate), tea, juice, etc. Maybe a few left over science experiments of lunches gone bad. Last time we checked there was still a giant piece of salmon in the freezer too.

Employee reward programs: Peer recognition program where employees award an oversized metallic wrench to teammates who go "above and beyond" in their effort, attitude or performance. Spot awards: free lunches, car washes, concert tickets, sporting event tickets, gift cards, employee referral awards.

Most played game in the office: Always changes. Lately, *Street Fighter IV, Left 4 Dead,* and *Resident Evil 5*.

Unique traditions: Every five years we take a companywide trip to commemorate a studio anniversary milestone. To commemorate our 10-year anniversary we embarked on a cruise to Ensenada, Mexico, and this past March we enjoyed a weekend in the Bahamas for our 15-year anniversary! In addition, we recently started an annual putt-putt golf tournament using our on-campus, nine-hole putting course.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: Besides the Inflato Ratchet tchotchkes from the *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando* campaign, our coolest memento would have to be the life-sized Bullseye Mark II weapon replica from *Resistance 2*. When you turn a switch near its trigger, the weapon snaps to life with realistic LED lights and an energy-charging sound.



Brian Allgeier

Best way to get a job at your studio: The devil is in the details as they say. Make sure to proof your resume, give us an accurate and complete online application, and be sure to attach a reel or other relevant work. This isn't about quantity, it's about quality. Show us the stuff that represents your BEST work, your ability, and style. Also, give credit to others when showing work that you did collaboratively so we know what's yours. Last, KNOW the studio you're applying to and the type of games they make. If you've been making sports games for 10 years, why do you want to work at Insomniac and how does your work translate to our games? Tell us or show us, but remember you've got less than one minute to make an impression.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

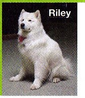
We've certainly learned a lot about taking better advantage of the SPUs, and redesigning our systems and gameplay to be more asynchronous. The PlayStation 3 is a computational powerhouse; if you want to build something that is based on calculating a lot of physics, objects, and collision detection, you can't do better. The water physics and simulation that we run in *Resistance 2* is a really clear example of something that is made possible by the CELL and its SPUs. Going forward, there is a lot of room to use the SPUs, and we'll see a lot of people find ways to use the SPUs that aren't directly related to graphics.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time is due this fall. And with a second studio in North Carolina now set up, there's little doubt that the team is already working on *Resistance 3* for 2010.

NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT

As described by Scott Pease, Development Director



GUITAR HERO
METALLICA

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

There was a pretty steep learning curve with early PS3 development, partly due to the complexity of the hardware itself and partly due to the tools from Sony, which were pretty difficult to work with initially. To their credit, Sony took a lot of developer feedback on board and there have been huge improvements on this front.

What really sets the PS3 apart is the CELL chip. Console game developers looking to push the hardware are facing an evolution in how they need to think about the processes that go on in games—from fairly monolithic, linear sets of operations to a much more parallelized, piecemeal approach. The CELL pushes developers to take the subdivision of these processes one step further; the nature of the SPE's [Synergistic Processing Element] really drives you to break your systems down into relatively tiny subsystems which can operate on small, carefully delineated chunks of data.

Developers have reached a point where they're sufficiently familiar with the PS3 RSX and PPE [Power Processing Element] that improvements will be incremental. We think the SPEs remain an underutilized resource; this is where the major increases in performance and abilities will come, particularly as more work is done on how to effectively utilize the SPE's in tandem with the RSX for greater graphical processing power.

411

Location: Woodland Hills, CA
Year founded: 1994
# of employees: 176 full-time plus a huge test crew
Studio motto: Work hard, play hard.
Games: *Tony Hawk Pro Skater, Spider-Man, Gun, Guitar Hero: World Tour*

STUDIOS/TITLES YOU MOST ADMIRE?

We're old school. The great games of the SNES, Genesis, and Tubographix 16 can teach you about all you need to know about great game making.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

"The next big *Guitar Hero* game. *Guitar Hero,* all day, all night..."

THE CULTURE

Regular company events: There's a regular company picnic with all kinds of outdoor activities, competitions, and free drinks. A few employees usually end up attempting to "swim" in the nearby swamp. We have been known to have our annual wrap/holiday party in Las Vegas... You don't want to know where people end up after that one.

In the fridge: Milk for coffee, some frozen dinners, someone's random smelly lunch from last week, salad dressing, and beer. Oh yeah, and thousands of cans of free, heavily caffeinated drinks.

Most played game in the office: *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*

Unique traditions: At our Vegas party our company President stumbles onstage at some point, rambles out an expletive-laden, mostly incoherent speech; we all cheer, and then rock the night away.

Strangest/coolest item in office: The company mascot is Riley, the big dog. You might see him chasing a tennis ball down a hall... We have tons of framed guitars, drums, etc. from musicians that have come in to work on the various *Guitar Hero* games as well as skateboards from many of the athletes we've worked with in the past. There's a full-sized coffin, an eight-foot Spider-Man, a small shrine to a James Hetfield sweat band, and a refrigerator signed by Tony Hawk.

Best way to get a job: Be insanely smart, highly motivated, and love games, because we work really fast here. It also doesn't hurt if you're cool to hang out with...

UBISOFT MONTREAL

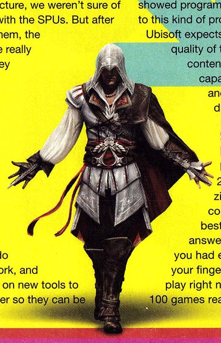
As described by Dominique Duvivier, 3D Programmer

411

Location: Montreal, Canada
Year founded: 1997
# of employees: 1,800
Studio motto: Ubisoft aims to be the best studio in the world by putting emphasis on research and development, exploring innovation, and pushing limits.
Games: *Tonic Trouble* and *Donald Duck Goin' Quackers* (which nobody remembers); *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell; Price of Persia* series; *Naruto: Rise of the Ninja; Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas* and *Vegas 2;* and *Assassin's Creed.*

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

The PS3 has a lot of unused power although it demands a special kind of work to express that power. On our first glance at the CELL architecture, we weren't sure of what we could do with the SPUs. But after a few years using them, the SPUs turn out to be really capable beasts. They can churn out a lot of computations, they're a perfect complement to the RSX, and if you program especially for them, they can surpass everything available in the current gen. They're also flexible enough to do a broad range of work, and Sony always works on new tools to make their use easier so they can be used for increasingly complex tasks.



The programming model used for SPUs is also the most future-proof, so we'll get to see it more and more. The latest GDC showed programmers are getting used to this kind of programming model, and Ubisoft expects a lot of progression in the quality of the games, helped on the content side by the storage capacity of the Blu-ray disc, and the non-optional hard drive.

STUDIOS/TITLES YOU MOST ADMIRE?

In March 2009, for its 200th issue, Edge Magazine (www.edge-online.com/features/the-100-best-games-to-play-today) answered the big question: If you had every game ever made at your fingertips, which would you play right now? The answer is a Top 100 games really worth the time spent playing. In any case, naturally, this kind of list generates as many nods of approbation as shivers of discontent. So we decided to organize the ultimate Ubisoft Montreal countdown of the best games of all time by asking the same question to our employees. People had to submit their Top 5 games they would still play today.

Based on their answers, here are the Ubisoft Montreal Top 5 Best Games to Play Today:

1. *Starcraft, The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past,* and *Final Fantasy VII*
2. *Resident Evil 4*
3. *Half-Life 2*
4. *World of Warcraft*
5. *Super Mario Bros. 3*

For Ubisoft games, people voted for *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time, Beyond Good & Evil, Assassin's Creed,* and the *Rainbow Six* series.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Assassin's Creed 2 [see page 24 for our full preview]; *Avatar;* more *Rainbow Six* [we hope].

BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT

As described by Chris Charla, VP Development

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

The PS3 is quite a fun system to work on. We've been really lucky in getting to work on a wide variety of projects on the system, and have had great results. It's actually our favorite platform to show tech and game demos on; because it has this reputation as this big bad machine, if you can show a demo running on PS3, people are generally pretty impressed. We've actually used a PS3 build to prototype out a demo for a Wii game, which might be unique!

There's a ton of power in the system for whatever you need, whether it's graphics, physics, etc. We're struggling to come up with game types that we couldn't do on PS3 and really can't think of any.

From the development side, we're excited about the future in features like remote play with PSP, and all the connectivity the system offers. People sometimes think of the PS3 as just a graphics powerhouse, and that's awesome, but there's actually a ton more depth in the connectivity that we think is going to get exploited over the next couple of years.

Studios/titles you most admire? We're into everything from the *Sims* to *Flower* to *F.E.A.R. 2.* Obviously, we love *Street Fighter* and *Rock Band,* and we still play a ton of classics. Pretty much anything weird.

Current projects: We're working on several announced PS3 and PSN titles. And while one doesn't hear Backbone mentioned as often or as loudly as an Insomniac or Naughty Dog, the company seems to have its hands everywhere and in everything, including creating the core tech behind PSN's Qore.

411

Location: Emeryville, CA
Year founded: 1992
# of employees: 80
Studio motto: Games with a spine
Games: *Super Street Fighter II Turbo, 1942 Joint Strike, Wolf of the Battlefield: Commando 3,* and *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* for PSN. The most recent is *Rock Band: Unplugged* for PSP.

74
E. HONDA
Player2

qore™

Presented by the PlayStation®Network

THE CULTURE

Regular company events: We do a short film festival annually, where people can enter films they've made. Also, we do regular art shows so employees can show off things from outside of work.

In the fridge: Lots of meat ready for summer barbequing—our grill is a major feature of working here! Also, lots of energy drinks, vegetarian stuff, and um, some boxes we're afraid to even open...

Employee reward programs: We celebrate anniversaries at monthly studio meetings, and teams often nominate a "player of the week" for their project. There's a tradition of coming up with off-the-wall rewards for some of them (classic games being a big component, of course). That, plus a huge free arcade in our kitchen goes over pretty well.

Most played game in office: We have an arcade in our kitchen. The most played game is either *SF IV* (running in the custom arcade cabinet we built for *Super Street Fighter II Turbo: HD Remix*) or *Rampart.* We play a lot of pinball, too.

Unique traditions: Our Halloween party... A couple years ago we had *Dance Dance Immolation* there (Google it!).

Strangest/coolest item: Either Arvin Bautista's stuffed bobcat, Whiskers, or from the *Death, Jr.* days, real, sharp, Australian scythes from what was probably the worst thought-out ShipIt! gift ever...

Best way to get a job: Demonstrate passion for games and skills in your discipline! We don't phone it in at Backbone—we love what we do and count on every team to make the best games possible.

THE CULTURE

Regular company events: It's important for us to understand and know what's happening elsewhere in our industry. Our in-house Playtest Lab offers gaming sessions for all of our employees. These one or two hour sessions include a brief presentation of the dominant characteristics of a game followed by an intensive trial period. This enables the participants to better understand the most recent games of our competitors, and keeps them current on the most recent game industry developments.

Hot Friday: Hot Friday is a knowledge sharing activity within the company and can be a lecture or a workshop. The session is from one to two hours long and usually occurs on a Friday. The invited lecturers are either Ubisoft employees or external professionals from the games industry, the cinema industry, or from other related fields.

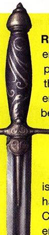
The objective is to encourage an exchange and interaction between Ubisoft employees to inspire creativity and innovation, clarify the goals and challenges in the cinema and interactive media industry, and share the initiatives of our projects/studios/services.

Brainstorms: Ubisoft offers an environment that facilitates the intellectual and creative blooming of its employees. We encourage employees to express themselves freely and to develop their critical sense. Several training and brainstorming activities are organized to stimulate knowledge sharing and the emergence of the new ideas.

Parties/Happy Hours: It's part of our lifestyle! ;)

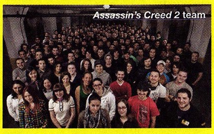
Annual Assembly: Our CEO gives an overview of the past year and presents strategies and projects for the year to come. This is followed by a huge party, of course.

In the fridge: Beers, expired lunches, ketchup, and popsicles.



Reward programs: We offer employees a complete benefits program, but we also believe in the importance of providing a work environment that fosters a balance between personal and professional lives. That's why we have an in-house gym, a daycare, and a Starbucks coffee counter! And as you may know, hockey is big in Montreal! So we often hand out tickets for the Montreal Canadians. We also encourage our employees to enjoy the Montreal cultural scene and nightlife with tickets for shows and events.

Most played game in the office: At lunch time people play racing and party games like *Guitar Hero* and *Forza Motorsport.* We also play *Left 4 Dead, Team Fortress 2,* and *Quake III,* mouse in one hand and sandwich in the other.



Assassin's Creed 2 team

Unique traditions: SHIP PARTIES! Last November, the studio survived a record-breaking fall season with no less than five game releases: *Petz Sports, Naruto: The Broken Bond, Far Cry 2, Shaun White Snowboarding,* and *Prince of Persia.* So we invited all the developers to participate in big party that we called "Frat Party."

Strangest/coolest item in the office: A mechanical dog...

Best way to get a job: Get some information about our projects before applying and prepare your portfolio according to the projects that you're interested in (be creative), and don't hesitate to follow up with recruiters as it demonstrates your interest. In addition, you might give us some information that we can't see on your resume or portfolio. Also, quick tip...you should go to E3, GDC, or SIGGRAPH and buy our HR director Suzanne Boutin a drink. ;)

THQ PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, FIGHTING GROUP

As described by *UFC 2009 Undisputed* Producer, Neven Dravinski

411

Location: Agoura Hills, CA
Year founded: 2003
# of employees: 35 in-house plus thousands more at Yuke's.
Studio motto: Team Violence
Games: *UFC 2009 Undisputed; SmackDown series*

CULTURE

Regular company events: Usually events in the group revolve around getting out of the office. Typically we'll go see the latest blockbuster movie, go get food in places that serve things on plates, and go consume a beverage or two somewhere.

In the fridge: The fridge is usually full of leftovers from last night's dinner. 6 pm LA time is usually about 10 am Japan time. We're constantly in video conference meetings at our end of the day that last well into the evening.

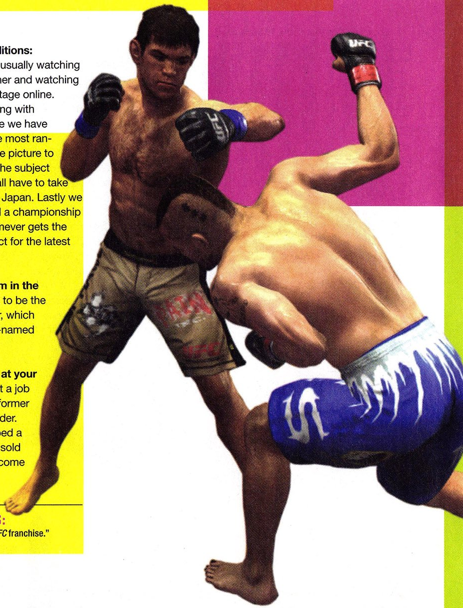
Reward programs: Employee rewards include "keeping your job," tickets to fights, and chauffeuring female talent for production purposes.

Most played game in the office: Most played games in the office are obviously *UFC 2009 Undisputed,* and *SmackDown vs. Raw 2009* and any and all good fighting games out there. From there, it's usually *Brickbreaker* on the Blackberry; really a savior during those long meetings.

Unique traditions: The team is usually watching fights together and watching obscure footage online. There's a thing with emails where we have to attach the most random obscure picture to emphasize the subject matter. We all have to take long trips to Japan. Lastly we pass around a championship belt to whomever gets the most predictions correct for the latest UFC fight.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: It's got to be the Hello Kitty shrine by far, which resides on a not-to-be-named designer's desk.

Best way to get a job at your studio: Best way to get a job around here is to be a former Championship Belt holder. Oh, and if you've shipped a fighting game that has sold over one million units, come on down!



THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

I think the shaders on the PS3 are beautiful. The graphics always come out clear and crisp. There's just something extra that you see in the picture quality. Also, having the Blu-ray is great icing on an already delicious cake. In fact, I would say the coolest thing about the PS3 is that it will play any media format…and I mean anything.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

"We're currently working on the *UFC* franchise."

NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE

As described by Robert Huebner, President

411

Location: Marin County, California
Year founded: 1998
# of employees: 52
Studio Motto: Hire the best talent and let them do their jobs
Games: *Conan; Zombie Apocalypse*

CULTURE

Regular company events: Friday cook-outs, softball team, ski trips, baseball games.

In the fridge: Equal mix of soda, Vitamin Water, and Red Bull.

Employee reward programs: Company ownership shares, profit sharing.

Most played game in the office: Varies. *Killzone* was big. *World of Warcraft* refuses to die as well.

Unique traditions: The "Pizza Orgy" is a first-public playtest of pre-alpha games among friends and family. A tradition from LucasArts, from which we spun-off in 1998. We also allow dogs at work and have three or four in the office daily.

Strangest/coolest item: Classic Midway Pinball machines designed by Pat Lawler.

Best way to get a job at your studio: Referrals by existing team members, or a great resume.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

It's cliché, but it's a very "deep" machine. Which means the deeper you dig, the more you can do with it. Even working on our third title for PS3 we're able to make frequent improvements in performance and visual quality because there's so many ways to do things. It really rewards experimentation and trying new things. Not everything works out and we've thrown out a lot of code over the years on failed experiments, but I think we're a long way from "maxing out" the hardware.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Zombie Apocalypse for PSN and an unnamed new PS3 game.

QUANTIC DREAM

As described by Guillaume deFondaumiere, Executive Producer, co-CEO

411

Location: Paris, France
Year founded: 1997
# of employees: 105
Vision: Videogames can be more than just toys. We want to leave an imprint in players' minds, not just loosely entertain them.
Games: *Omikron: The Nomad Soul; Indigo Prophecy*

CULTURE

Regular company events: We have a show, two or three Fridays a month, during which departments can show off what they have been working on recently.

We also have a "Happy Tuesday" gathering every two months (which never takes place on a Tuesday), where the whole company meets on our large Mo-cap set to eat and drink together and share the latest company information.

What's in the fridge: We had to recently switch off the fridges because of power issues due to the development ramp up. Otherwise, there is always champagne in our fridges to celebrate any positive thing happening during the course of the development, be it a great review, a cover story, or a delivered Milestone. Last year, we drank close to 60 bottles and hopefully this year we'll drink more...

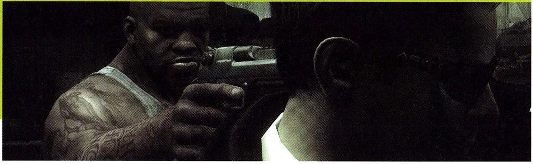
Employee reward programs: We have different ways to reward employees, but the culture in France is more to reward people "intimately" rather than publically.

Most played game in the office: As we now have hit Alpha, the most played game is by far *Heavy Rain.* Most people work on a very specific aspect of the game, so during the lunch break they can take the opportunity to see how the game is coming along. Otherwise, I know most people in the company play *Killzone 2* right now when they are at home, which is also what I have been playing the past six weeks.

Unique traditions: We try once a year to organize one day outside the company and have fun together. Last year we rented a fleet of Buggies and did a treasure hunt in a very nice area 40km away from Paris. The tradition is to not tell anyone what we do and where we go so it is a surprise.

Strangest/coolest item in the studio's office: We have a wall in our kitchen where we post and regularly update some videogame- and computer-related ads dating back to the '70s. My favorite one advertises XCOM's 10MB storage system "for only $3,398 (U.S.)" A bargain...

Best way to get a job at your studio: Send us a clear, concise, and well thought out response to the advertized position. Respecting the clearly indicated procedure and format gives any applicant a huge advantage over all the others (actually the majority of applicants) who do not.



Quantic Dream CEOs David Cage and Guillaume deFondaumiere

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

What stands out most about its abilities?
I guess the graphics power is what we relied upon most and it certainly is delivering very impressively on that.

Opinions, prophecies on what it's going to be capable of in the years ahead?
The PS3 may deliver strongest in the future on its online capabilities. I am not thinking only MMOs, but also community-based experiences and most importantly online services.

What studios/titles do you most admire?

- Bioware/Pandemic: When you sell your company for 800 million dollars, you can't be totally wrong.
- *LittleBigPlanet:* It must have been hell to pitch, but the result is fabulous.
- Famito Ueda for *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus.*

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Quantic Dream announced it was at work on *Omikron 2* and *Heavy Rain* back in 2005, but is currently only discussing *Heavy Rain* [see page 8]. *Heavy Rain* has all the potential of realizing the PS3's power in a different way than traditional tech showcases like *Resistance* or *Killzone,* while its dynamic story-telling techniques and multiple character roles provide potential new ways of delivering narrative immersion.

VICIOUS CYCLE SOFTWARE, INC.

As described by Eric Peterson, President and CEO

411

Location: Morrisville, NC
Year founded: 2000
# of employees: 60+
Studio motto: Work hard, play hard.
Games: *Curious George* and *Spy vs. Spy* on past systems; now owned by D3 Publisher, *Ben 10 Alien Force* on PS2 and PSP, and *Dead Head Fred* on PSP.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

Developing for the PS3 can be complicated due to subtleties of the hardware. If you don't use the hardware to its best advantage, it makes it hard to compete against other developers who are able to take full advantage of the system.

Over the next three years we should see the development community really starting to tap into the power of the PS3 hardware. There is still a lot of potential on the system and I believe that we will see better games over its life cycle compared to other platforms on the market. More graphics, physics, and rendering will get moved to the SPUs moving forward which will allow for larger worlds, more simulation, more dynamic objects, and better visuals overall. It is a very exciting time in the games industry and we look forward to bringing high quality titles to the PS3 in the future.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Vicious Cycle's *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* has just released and a sequel is likely in the works.

THE CULTURE

CULTURE

Regular company events: Beer Fridays, movie days, bagel days, monthly birthday celebrations, game tournaments.

In the fridge: The typical science experiments exist in our fridge that you would find at any game studio; maybe the cure for cancer is in there...who knows? ;) Outside of the fridge, we offer plenty of free Cokes/drinks, coffees/lattes/teas, assorted snacks, etc.

Employee reward programs: Employee awards (Achievement Award, VCS Values Award, Dedication Award), referral bonuses, product ship bonus, annualized bonus, employee purchase program (for company games and Dell computers).

Most played games: *Left 4 Dead* and *World of Warcraft.*

Strangest/coolest item: Since I can't mention people on staff, I will just say we have a pool table, arcade collection, a life-size Ben 10 statue, and some framed marketing items hung up around the office.

Best way to get a job: Submitting a solid portfolio and demo materials. Demonstrating a passion for the industry. Being creative. Bribes are always accepted as well. ;) I take Visa, Mastercard, and money orders.

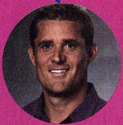
ELECTRONIC ARTS VISCERAL GAMES

As described by Glen Schofield, Vice President and General Manager

411

Location: Redwood City, CA
Year founded: 1982
# of Employees: 240
Studio motto: It's in our blood
Games: Numerous, including *The Simpsons Game, 007: Everything or Nothing, The Godfather, The Godfather II, The Lord of the Rings* movie-based games, *Dead Space*

Dante's Inferno



CULTURE

We try and do an "All Hands" meeting every six weeks or so to show everyone all the games in production, and the individual teams have regular weekly team meetings. Both are fun, informative, and have lots of "beverages" and food. We're also a very competitive bunch; we have "Battle of the Bands" where teams go on stage and are judged on the best *Rock Band* performance, we've had cheese eating and hot wings eating contests, and a very competitive dodge ball league.

In the fridge: Everything and anything. Some things aren't identifiable anymore.

Employee reward programs: Gift cards, bonuses, and team-based rewards.

Most played game in the office: Depends on what just came out!

Unique traditions: Ship parties after every game. Each team chooses their own venue and way to celebrate. Plus, there's the ever-popular Halloween costume contest and a great company Holiday Party in December.

Strangest/coolest item in the office: Fake severed body parts, a life size Isaac Clarke *(Dead Space)*, an entrance to Hell *(Dante's Inferno)* and great concept art from every game on the walls.

Best way to get a job at the studio: Education, good attitude, and a passion for making great games.

GEARBOX STUDIOS

As described by Randy Pitchford, President and CEO

411

Location: Plano, TX
Year founded: 1999
# of employees: 130
Studio motto: Creativity, Happiness, Success
Games: *Half-Life* ports and expansions; *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* and *Halo* for PC; *Brothers in Arms* series

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

The PS3 is a sexy, powerful machine. Look at it from a few points: graphics and performance, market relevance, and other factors.

I think it's pretty clear at this point that in the long game, the PS3 can have an edge in graphics and performance depending upon how specialized the software can be with the PS3's SPUs. It's harnessing that power that is a challenge for most developers and requires a substantial investment for us to do so. But, at this stage in the life cycle, we're beginning to feel and see some areas where we're able to get more from the PS3 version than competitive platforms. There are still some places where the PS3 is behind, and so I think the customer experience is a net wash and it's really up to individual platform preference.

The PS3 has succeeded with market relevance, so from Gearbox's point of view, our multiplatform games will increasingly concern themselves with quality on the PS3. The market is growing, and although it's not as strong as the Sony platform in the last generation, there are still a tremendous number of customers that love their newest PlayStation (including me) and are excited to play games that take advantage of its unique capabilities.

As far as other features, I think the free online service is a compelling option for customers and attractive for us as developers. Supporting the online experience requires more software from us, but we get to have more control over the experience as a result. My personal experience is that the Sixaxis turned out to be more of a gimmick than a new revolutionary gaming input. However, anecdotally, clever applications of the Sixaxis have brought me joy and we continue to spend some mindshare on considering applications for the unique feature. One of the "other feature" categories that we love most about the PS3 is the Blu-ray disc and its tremendous storage advantage over DVD. While there are some risks with seek times that developers have to be careful about, the storage capabilitity of Blu-ray is a dream come true for the kinds of games we create that feature lots of high fidelity music, voice over, and huge amounts of graphics content. This PS3 advantage cannot be overstated.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Inspired by the PC game *Diablo* and the *Mad Max* movies, Gearbox's *Borderlands* is a first-person shooter with RPG elements that offers four-player cooperative play and an online multiplayer component. *Aliens: Colonial Marines,* due in 2010, takes place after the movie *Alien 3,* and is a squad-based first-person shooter, in which you control four differently skilled marines.

THE CULTURE

Regular company events: Game Time (every day at 5pm), Game of the Month (sort of like a once-a-month book club, but for the latest videogames), Quarterly Company Luncheon (a "state-of-the-box" meeting at a local movie theater with food, etc.), spring picnic, and a generous holiday party—that's where a lot of our people tend to get their Xbox 360s, PS3s, and Wiis as gifts.

In the fridge: A picture tells a handful of words.

Employee reward programs: Quarterly "call outs" for awesome performance or quality.

Most played game in the office: Currently *Smash Brothers, Left 4 Dead, Rock Band 2.*

Unique traditions: We tend to do pretty epic videogame launch events (The *Hell's Highway* launch was celebrated with a "Victory Party"—DJ Jazzy Jeff spun live for over 1,000 guests at the Palladium in Dallas).

Strangest/coolest item in the office: The IT gnome.

Best way to get a job at your studio: Be awesome at something in game dev and tell us who you are.

What studios/titles do you most admire? Valve and BioWare are at the top of my list for their consistency and commitment to high quality games.

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

We love developing on the PS3—it's usually our lead SKU. The graphical capabilities are amazing as you can see with *Dead Space* and *Dante's Inferno.* We have a very close relationship with Sony and working with them has been a pleasurable partnership. They continue to work with us closely and I usually see Rob Dyer [head of SCEA's third-party developer relationships] eating in our cafe once a month! Having them right down the road is a nice benefit.

Obviously we love the fact that the disc can hold so much data. We can add tons of movies, interviews, and extras—there's no doubt that's a huge attraction for any developer.

The future is only going to bring better games—more realistic graphics, tons of special effects, amazing physics, better tools, and games that are even closer to movies than ever. I'm picturing smoke-filled battles with hundreds or thousands of NPCs, vehicles, trees, foliage, buildings, and everything is destructible, the audio is amazing, and there's gameplay we haven't even imagined yet. It's a developer's dream to think about your next game and how you can improve, but thinking about the next console is even better. I just hope it's still a few years away—we're still learning new ways to squeeze more out of the PS3 even today.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

One of the biggest internal projects in development is *Dante's Inferno,* which will blend *God of War*-like action with *Shadow of the Colossus*-like scale, and wrap it in a dust cover of one of literature's most well-regarded works. We also hope for more *Dead Space* to build on the solid foundation of the original.

THE CULTURE

BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS

As described by Todd Howard, Game Director

Regular company events: We have our own 150 seat movie theater in the office, so we have large team meetings in there as well as movie nights. We also use it to play the latest big game releases for the whole team to watch.

In the fridge: We have our own chef! Specialties include Cajun chicken pasta and crab cakes.

Employee reward programs: Our chef! And annual bonuses.

Most played game in the office: *Team Fortress 2. WoW.*

Unique traditions: We have a speed run competition whenever we're wrapping up development on a game. Whoever can finish the fastest without cheating gets a pie of their choice.

Strangest item in the office: Our *Fallout 3* "Bloody Mess" cake, made by Charm City Cakes, of "Ace of cakes" fame. Or our mammoth *Brotherhood of Steel* soldier.

Best way to get a job here: We hire a lot of folks from our QA department, but when applying from the outside, we look for one thing—a passion for gaming. It's also good to make a mod using our publicly available tools.

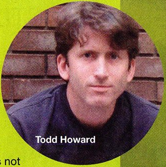
What studios/titles do you most admire? Anything by Blizzard or Valve.

411

Location: Rockville, MD
Year founded: 1986
# of employees: 90
Studio motto: "Great games are played, not made."
Games: *PBA Bowling* (!), *Terminator* series, *The Elder Scrolls* series, *Fallout 3*

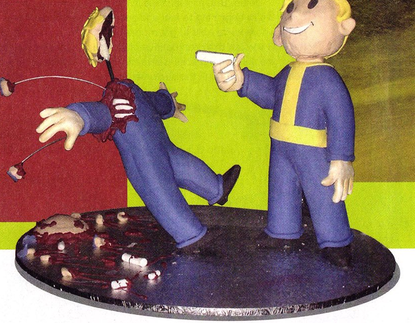
THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

It's a very interesting system architecture, and it really hasn't been until the last year that developers have cracked it and really "gotten" how to use so many small processors each with their own memory. It takes a different type of thinking to maximize what it can do, but you're starting to see it now from simple things like running animation on an SPU, to more exotic things like line-of-sight rendering in *Killzone 2.* It's not too hard to draw a quality line from the first PS3 games to the latest, and guess where it's going to be at the end of this year, and then 2010. Include additions to PSN and the install base of 1080p televisions, the next 12 months should see the PS3 doing some very impressive things.


Todd Howard

CURRENT PROJECTS:

When asked to describe its next in-house game, Game Director Todd Howard said, "unannounced AwesomeSauce," which we felt had to be printed. Obviously, the developer-turned-publisher hasn't announced its next project, though *Fallout 3* has received three downloadable packs—Operation Anchorage, The Pitt, and Broken Steel—but none for PS3. *Fallout: New Vegas* is currently in development at Obsidian Entertainment for release on PS3 in 2010.



RUNNING WITH SCISSORS

As described by the irrepressible company president, the one and only Vince Desi →

CULTURE

Regular company events: Meth appreciation day, Vince makes dinner day, bring a hooker to work day.

In the fridge: Mold, olive oil, Everclear, dynamite, Don Julio Blanco.

Employee reward programs: Rehab, guns and ammo.

Most played game in the office: Russian Roulette.

Unique traditions: BBQ when someone is fired, hookers for Christmas.

Strangest item in the office: Kalishnikov vodka in actual-size glass AK-47 bottle; Vince's crucifix collection.

Best way to get a job at your studio: Have a hot sister. Bonus for multiple hot sisters and/or hot mom.

What studios/titles do you most admire? Any independent studio that isn't hooked up to a big publisher's tit.

411

Location: Tucson, AZ
Year founded: 1996
# of employees: Variable
Studio motto: "It's always funny until someone gets hurt and then it's absolutely friggin' hysterical!"
Games: *Postal* series

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

The critical thing we've learned about the PS3 is that you can never let it see weakness. It can see into your soul. It knows if you are sleeping. It knows when you're awake. It will see its enemies driven before it and hear the lamentations of the women. It will drink your milkshake. Soon, it will become self-aware and begin building robot terminators to hunt down and extinguish the human race. Also, if you open it, it smells like rubber bands and 4-in-1 oil.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Postal III, this fall…that's the plan.

GUERRILLA GAMES

As described by
Hermen Hulst,
Managing Director

411

Location: Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Year founded: 2000
Number of employees: 126
Studio motto: "Shoot for the moon and if you miss you will still be among the stars."
Games: *Shellshock: Nam '67* (as Lost Boys Games), *Killzone*, *Killzone 2*

CULTURE

Regular company events: The Guerrilla soccer tournaments, Pet Project Sundays, Friday Frag Fest, barbecues in the garden, movie screenings in the garden house. And I think we started a new tradition last Christmas party with stand-up comedy by our design team.

What's in the fridge? The one in the cantina belongs to our in-house chef and she exclusively serves healthy meals. The one in the lobby next to the vending machine is stocked with Heineken, Amstel, and Grolsch for Friday drinks.

Employee reward programs: We have financial reward schemes in place related to the success of our projects, but more importantly, as part of our goal to strike the right balance between work and personal time, we have a time-for-time arrangement to give our developers some much needed rest after periods of crunch time.

Most played game in the office: Obviously, we play *Killzone 2* a lot, along with the DLC packs we're developing for the game. Aside from that it varies from department to department; strolling through the studio after hours, you'll find employees playing *World of Warcraft*, *Motorstorm: Pacific Rift*, *Street Fighter IV*, or even vintage games like *Missile Command* and *Defender*.

Unique traditions: We have plenty of traditions, most of which have to do with quirky Dutch traditions. For instance, on your birthday, you don't get things, you give things, typically sweets, to everyone. Effectively, this means that we run on a permanent sugar rush, completely annihilating our chef's healthy intensions.

Strangest/coolest item in the office: The old money vault in the basement—our building used to be a bank—makes a pretty cool server park. But of course, our favorites are the larger than life-size Helghast mannequins, which mysteriously relocate every few weeks. Even after all these years, they can really freak you out if you walk into the bathroom and there's a giant Helghast, dressed up in an orange wig for Queensday, pointing an assault rifle at you.

Best way to get a job at your studio: A lot of the guys that get hired have worked with some of us in some capacity in the past. An introduction or a reference never hurts, but certainly isn't a necessity. Another good way to apply for a job at Guerrilla is to present us with an excellent portfolio, which demonstrates your skills and understanding of the game development process. We're always looking for what makes an application stand out from the crowd. We are hiring now, so go ahead and impress us!

THE PS3 EXPERIENCE:

What have you learned about the PS3? We've found that the PS3 is often easier to develop for than its competition, provided one approaches it with the right mindset. The CELL-based architecture allows programmers to simply offload all of their calculation tasks onto the SPUs. On other platforms, general-purpose cores must handle a variety of tasks and calculations—which then quickly become a nightmare to synchronize. In that regard, we believe the PS3's reputation for being "difficult" to develop for is largely undeserved.

What stands out the most about its abilities? The floating point performance of the CELL processor is really unparalleled, especially when compared to other platforms.

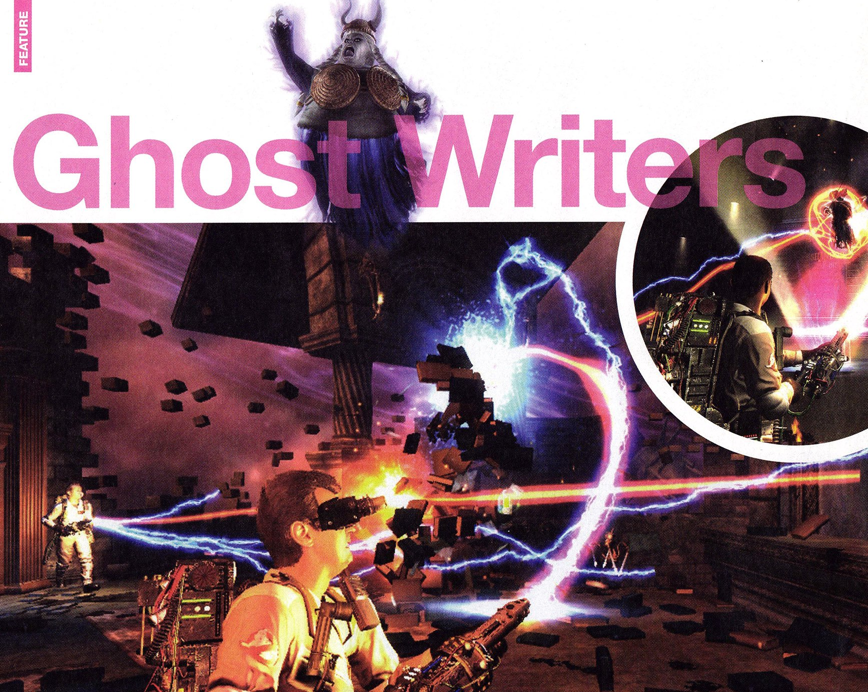
What do you think it's going to be capable of in the years ahead? With *Killzone 2* one of our goals was to create an audio-visual benchmark for the PS3, to prove what the platform was capable of. As developers become more intimately familiar with the PS3's inner workings, we will see new benchmarks, not just set by first party studios, but by third parties as well. On the other end of the spectrum, we'll see the PS3 become a vibrant platform for smaller, PSN-deliverable indie games.

What studios/titles do you most admire? This really varies from developer to developer. We've recently gone out to Naughty Dog, Insomniac, and the *God of War* team at Sony Santa Monica to exchange some experiences. Those teams are certainly some of our favorites.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

"We're working on downloadable content for *Killzone 2,*" the studio tells PTOM. "By the time this goes to press, the first DLC pack, "Steel & Titanium," will be out and available via PSN. We also have other ideas and projects in the works, but we can't reveal anything about that at the moment." ■

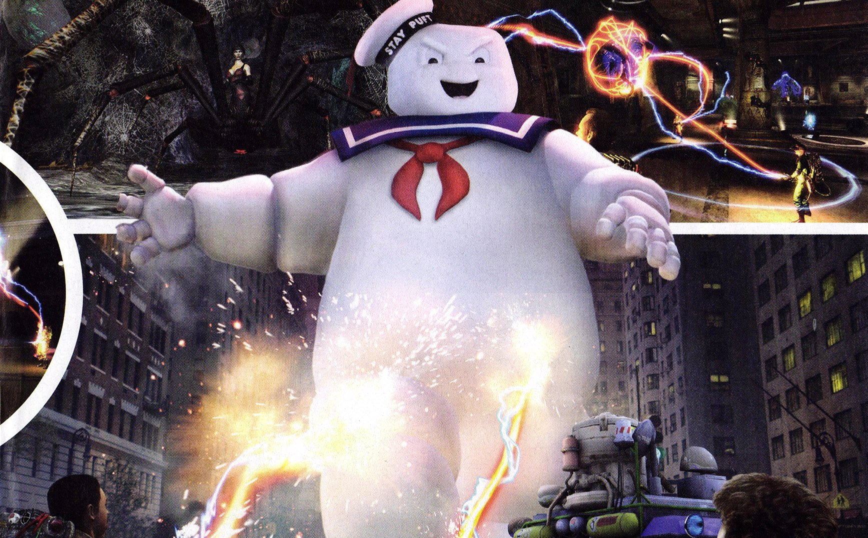
Ghost Writers



Who you gonna call!!

When someone asks you if you want to discuss *Ghostbusters* with creators Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, you say yes.

By Scott Butterworth

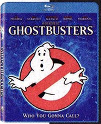


Let's face it: *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* is more than a game. As a direct continuation of the second film's storyline and the first legitimate piece of new *Ghostbusters* content in well over a decade, it's more like a grand geek homecoming, the culmination of 25 years of worth of devoted fandom. It's the triumphant return of a franchise that deserves a revival much more than most.

Fans will finally be able to strap on a proton pack of their very own and join New York's finest supernatural janitors in the fight against, not just ghosts, but all manner of otherworldly creatures—from flaming gargoyles to previously obliterated marshmallow men. And as the team's young new recruit, you'll enjoy the privilege of testing dangerous experimental equipment as you receive a first-hand education in both tracking and wrangling the dead.

Best of all, every detail will feel entirely authentic thanks to the extensive involvement of the two men responsible for inventing all-things *Ghostbusters:* Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, the stars and scriptwriters of the original films. We recently had a chance to speak with both about the game, the movies, and the future of the franchise. That is, after we stopped pretending to not be really, really excited to talk to them.

BOO-RAY



Lucky for PS3 owners, the game isn't the only piece of *Ghostbusters* goodness to look forward to: a special edition Blu-ray Disc of the original film will be released on June 16th (the same day as the game) to mark the movie's 25th anniversary. In addition to offering the pristine audio and video you'd expect from the Blu-ray format, the disc will contain:

- Slimer mode – A Picture-in-Picture running commentary track full of behind-the-scenes info and interviews
- Featurettes on the making of the film, the restoration of the Ecto-1, the film's special effects, and more
- 10 deleted scenes
- A 32-page collectible scrapbook
- Subtitles, storyboards, and closed captioning
- The kitchen sink

Exclusive PTOM Interview

So how did you first become involved with this project?

RAMIS: I just remember a communication coming proposing that we participate in the game, lend our voices, and at least consult on the writing. We met with the designers and they seemed like great guys and, yeah, we jumped in.

Did you have any apprehensions about doing a serious *Ghostbusters* project as a videogame?

AYKROYD: Of course! When I first heard about it—and looking upon some of the past efforts that had been done and some of the games that are out there—I was concerned. But then it occurred to me that the equipment, the characters, the world that it lives in—if done properly—are a perfect adaptation in this medium. So I went to the [developers], they invited me in, they pitched me the idea, and here were guys that were probably in their teens when the second movie came out and had grown up to a point now that their careers were in game development. They had the age and experience and skills, wisdom, and technical power to do a game, and they were genuinely fans. So what you have here is a game developed by engineers and by writers who were fans when they were kids. And how much more of a truthful creative endeavor can there be?

What was it like working with Terminal Reality? Tell us a little about the collaboration process.

AYKROYD: To me, the developers were the stars of this enterprise. We were there to serve them. They took it out as far technically as it could go. They really utilized the equipment from the original movie to make something special, and I think that they did such a great job. We knew when we read that first draft that, hey, they've got it, let's just help them take it back to that original tone and basically stay out of their way and let them run with it. They want flying skulls coming from the ceiling? Great. They want books turning into cubes, they want to toast the marshmallow man and break him up into bits, you know, that's taking the original vision and really extrapolating it right out to where a game should be.

Were you able to explore old ideas that you couldn't pull off in the movies?

AYKROYD: Yes. Just blowing out the sides of buildings and seeing Manhattan in those big 'scapes up on the 30th floor of buildings, and also the island coming out of the Hudson river, the whole sequence with the boat, lots more flying stuff, lots more. You can do 100 times what you could in a movie for the money. Make Manhattan look even more exciting than we did in the first two movies, and really build it into a character and a living breathing entity, which I think they've done a great job of doing.

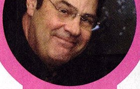
RAMIS: There was a thing that was in the game for a while, a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The floats and stuff—we had [the Ghostbusters] fighting on one of the very large balloon floats because it's possessed. But I don't think it made the final cut.

That's a shame; that's an excellent idea.

RAMIS: It seemed like a very New York thing, and it could be fun to see it rendered that way. But what *is* in there seems appropriate and consistent with the scripts of the first two films. What's most amazing to me is seeing us digitally rendered running around as thin as we were with dark hair.

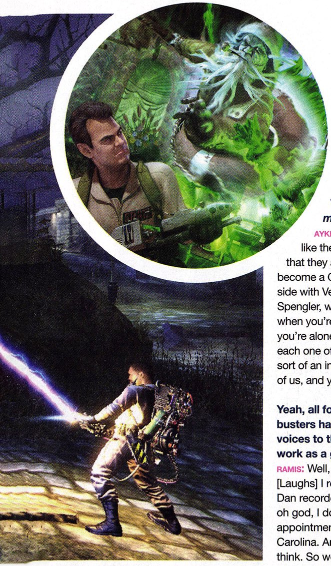
Yeah, how does it feel to see yourself rendered in a videogame?

RAMIS: I would be lying if I said that it wasn't flattering. And now there's going to be a new action figure line coming out with our



DAN AYKROYD 411

OCCUPATION: Comedy star, and creator of the *Ghostbusters* movies
CHARACTER'S NAME: Ray Stantz
CHARACTER'S OCCUPATION: Parapsychologist, applied physicist, and "heart" of the Ghostbusters
STATUS: Not a ghost
IN REAL LIFE: We bumped into Mr. Aykroyd at the sandwich table before our interview. He asked us where the mustard was. We didn't know. A close casual encounter with a legend who seemed like a pretty swell guy, despite not being able to locate the condiments!



actual likenesses. Everything in merchandising before was platformed off the cartoon show that looked nothing like us. But I feel like there's a kind of immortality, a digital immortality in having your voice and likeness in a game. It's amazing. And at the same time the healthy part of me says, "Don't get hung up. Don't start thinking you're an icon or a legend. That could be a trap."

AYKROYD: I was *very* pleased they shaved at least 60 pounds off me. [Laughs] And that they youthen'd me up a bit. And I think what I was most pleased about was that it took you back to the flavor of the first movie. They chose to recreate how we looked then, and that's fair. It takes us back to the experience that we all enjoyed when we saw the first movie, and it harkens back to that, and I think the choices were great.

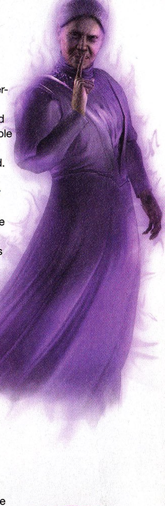
Do you think the script is going to appeal more to the long-time hardcore fans or to a newer, more casual audience?
RAMIS: Well, you know, trying to recapture enough of what people liked in the film and yet offer them enough different stuff so that it doesn't seem like a movie they have already seen…I think they did really well on that—and, in fact, used the environments that we had contemplated in writing the first two movies, things we thought about but never made it in. Stuff on the water and the barge for instance. And more library stuff, and all the environments seemed appropriate and fresh enough.

What will the diehard fans like *most* about this game?
AYKROYD: I think they're going to like the fact that they can join us, that they are now part of the team. You become a Ghostbuster. You walk side by side with Venkman, with Zeddemore, with Spengler, with Stantz. There are moments when you're with the group, moments when you're alone, and then moments you're with each one of those individuals. And there's sort of an intimacy there. Now you are part of us, and you're part of that fraternity.

Yeah, all four of the original Ghostbusters have returned to lend their voices to this game. What was it like to work as a group again?
RAMIS: Well, we live in a virtual world. [Laughs] I recorded my stuff in Chicago, Dan recorded in New York, Bill recorded… oh god, I don't even know where. He had appointments in both Arizona and North Carolina. And Ernie was in California, I think. So we were all over the place. I got to hear them, but you know, weeks apart and nowhere near each other geographically. But the spirit of it is alive in the game, and there's a live action sequel on the table. We're all kind of curious about that and looking forward to the possibility of actually getting together on a stage somewhere.

What *is* the deal with the third film?
RAMIS: There's a deal on the table. My new film is called *Year One,* and the guys I wrote with are Gene Stupnitsky and Lee Eisenberg—they're producers/writers on *The Office.* And they were both actually kind of protégés of mine. I really like these guys; I think they're really funny, and their writing is great. And the studio…when the idea of a third *Ghostbusters* kind of really took hold at Columbia, they asked me if I thought Gene and Lee were up to it, and I said, "Yeah, absolutely." So they're working on the script. They're kind of still in the story phase, and Dan and I and [original *Ghostbusters* director] Ivan Reitman are consulting with them every step of the way, and uh, we'll see. If they get a great script, then they'll be able to engage a good director and a marketable cast, and we'll see.

Did the game help with the idea of the third movie taking hold?
RAMIS: Well I think one thing that the game has done is—I wouldn't say it *revived* interest in *Ghostbusters* because the interest has been there in the audience. But it kind of reminded the studio of how much people want to continue their involvement with *Ghostbusters.* So yeah, it certainly helped.



What are the necessary ingredients for the third film?
AYKROYD: We need some new recruits, like in the game. We need some cadets. Our bodies are getting old. The Ghostbusters of the last generation are now…well, they're getting hip replacements and knee replacements and they can't haul that equipment around. They can work administratively, but we need a whole new youthful group to shoulder and take on the responsibilities.

What are your fondest memories of shooting the original films?
AYKROYD: Well, shooting in New York City and stealing shots, you know, running down 5th Avenue with a smoking trap… When we got to the big set at Columbia, when I walked onto that big set—when we all did—it was quite impressive. The construction of the rooftop of that building was…I mean, it was awesome. It really just brought home that, yep, here we are, million dollar make-believe; all it takes is time and money.

I've heard that, when working on the original scripts, Dan was the believer and Harold was more of the skeptic when it came to the supernatural. Would you say that's about right?
RAMIS: That is exactly right. [Laughs]

Has your outlook on the supernatural changed at all over the years?
RAMIS: Not in the least.

So you guys haven't had to bust any ghosts in real life?
AYKROYD: No, Harold would probably not show up because he doesn't believe. *I* would show up. I can tell you, though, that almost every county in America right now has a paranormal investigation society with tape recorders and cameras and heat sensing equipment. So it's really out there in the real world, the proliferation of paranormal investigation has developed quite extensively since the movies were made. And I think the movies in large part got people interested in this. So if Harold doubts, well, we'll have to take him to Ellis Island some time and let him spend the night. The park rangers say it's the most haunted place in America. ■

HARRIS RAMIS 411

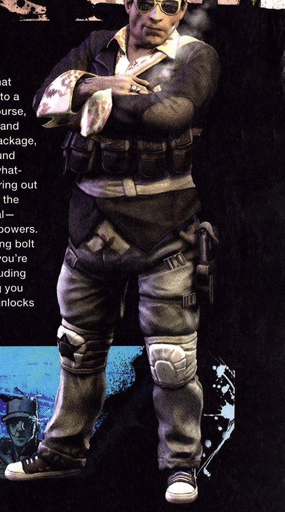
OCCUPATION: Comedy star, and co-writer of the original *Ghostbusters* movies
CHARACTER'S NAME: Egon Spengler
CHARACTER'S OCCUPATION: Parapsychologist and inventor of most of the Ghostbusters' equipment
STATUS: Also not a ghost
IN REAL LIFE: He speaks *exactly* like he does in the movie—totally deadpan. And he has a spectacularly dry sense of humor. A real pleasure to talk to.

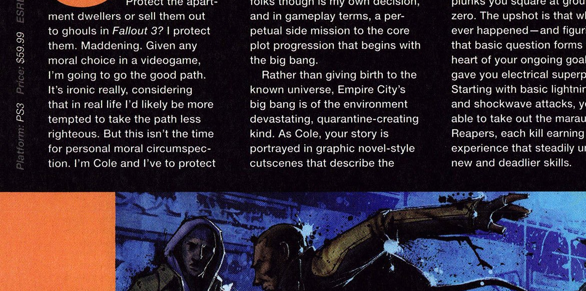
INFAMOUS

Platform: PS3 Price: $59.99 ESRB: Teen Publisher: SCEA Developer: Sucker Punch

Sometimes I make myself sick. Save or harvest a Little Sister in *BioShock?* I save. Protect the apartment dwellers or sell them out to ghouls in *Fallout 3?* I protect them. Maddening. Given any moral choice in a videogame, I'm going to go the good path. It's ironic really, considering that in real life I'd likely be more tempted to take the path less righteous. But this isn't the time for personal moral circumspection. I'm Cole and I've to protect the frazzled citizens of Empire City from Reapers, Conduits, and their own insistence on running into harm's way. This calling to protect the regular folks though is my own decision, and in gameplay terms, a perpetual side mission to the core plot progression that begins with the big bang.

Rather than giving birth to the known universe, Empire City's big bang is of the environment devastating, quarantine-creating kind. As Cole, your story is portrayed in graphic novel-style cutscenes that describe the earth-shattering events that have turned your home into a lawless crazy-town. Of course, your job as a messenger, and your delivery of an odd package, plunks you square at ground zero. The upshot is that whatever happened—and figuring out that basic question forms the heart of your ongoing goal—gave you electrical superpowers. Starting with basic lightning bolt and shockwave attacks, you're able to take out the marauding Reapers, each kill earning you experience that steadily unlocks new and deadlier skills.

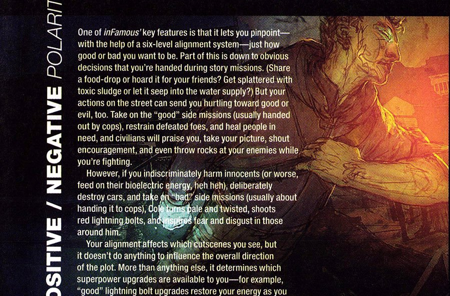




THE PATH IS YOURS TO CHOOSE

BY ROB SMITH

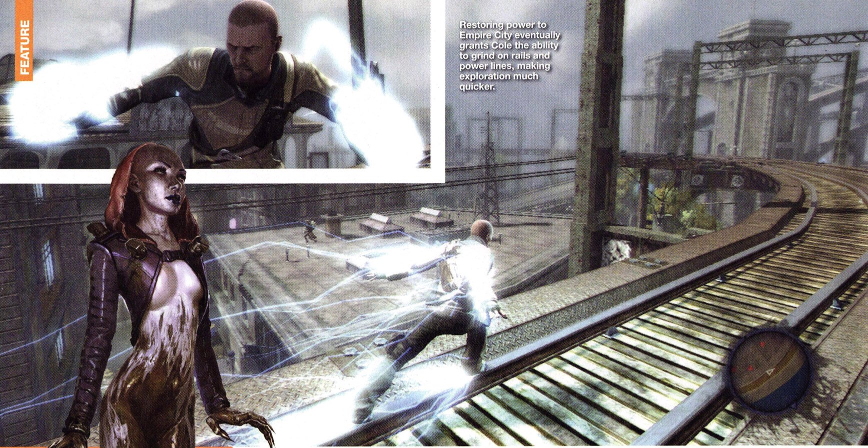
POSITIVE / NEGATIVE *POLARITY*



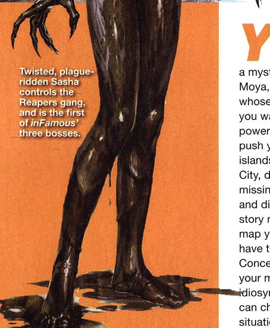
One of *inFamous'* key features is that it lets you pinpoint—with the help of a six-level alignment system—just how good or bad you want to be. Part of this is down to obvious decisions that you're handed during story missions. (Share a food-drop or hoard it for your friends? Get splattered with toxic sludge or let it seep into the water supply?) But your actions on the street can send you hurtling toward good or evil, too. Take on the "good" side missions (usually handed out by cops), restrain defeated foes, and heal people in need, and civilians will praise you, take your picture, shout encouragement, and even throw rocks at your enemies while you're fighting.

However, if you indiscriminately harm innocents (or worse, feed on their bioelectric energy, heh heh), deliberately destroy cars, and take on "bad" side missions (usually about handing it to cops), Cole turns pale and twisted, shoots red lightning bolts, and inspires fear and disgust in those around him.

Your alignment affects which cutscenes you see, but it doesn't do anything to influence the overall direction of the plot. More than anything else, it determines which superpower upgrades are available to you—for example, "good" lightning bolt upgrades restore your energy as you zap foes while "evil" ones add destructive touches like explosive bursts.



Restoring power to Empire City eventually grants Cole the ability to grind on rails and power lines, making exploration much quicker.



Twisted, plague-ridden Sasha controls the Reapers gang, and is the first of *inFamous'* three bosses.

You're pushed to use these skills by your EMT former girlfriend, Trish, a mysterious FBI agent called Moya, and your best buddy Zeke whose grating voiceover makes you want to use your fledgling powers on him. Collectively they push you around the first of three islands that makes up Empire City, demanding your help to find missing relatives and colleagues, and directing you to the core story missions. Pulling up a world map you can see where you have to travel and set waypoints. Concerned citizens then interrupt your main story run with their own idiosyncratic requests, and you can choose how to treat each situation, measured on a Karma gauge. Successfully completing these fairly short side missions by taking the good route clears out that segment of the city from Reapers, making it safe for you to travel freely. They'll often cause your electrical energy supply to be depleted, but it's usually a temporary effect cloaked in the price you must pay for your empathetic gallantry.

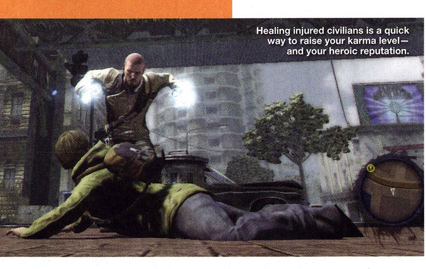
PARKOUR POWER

Getting around the city is actually the star of *inFamous'* open-world show. A slick, intuitive mechanic lets you easily scale the tall buildings, leap across rooftops, tiptoe across wires, cling to ledges, and scale lampposts. You don't need any cumbersome lock-on effect to execute these moves; you just jump and let the system take over to grab each surface. Once you've unlocked the grinding maneuver you can move even faster along the rail tracks and wires, gathering momentum that can lead to some spectacular leaps, kicks, and takedowns. This speed is as handy for evasion as it is for just getting around. The screen turns grey as enemy bullets are pounding into you, but it's kind of neat to jump, jump, jump up a building, around a corner, and find a spot to rest and regenerate your health.

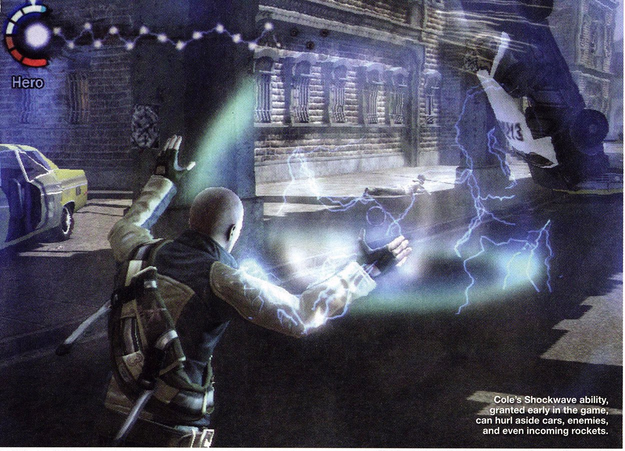
Given that there are three core factions of enemies—the Reapers, the homeless Dustmen, and the eerie Brotherhood, each inhabiting the three islands—there isn't too much variation in their tactics, so instead you face more of them with each successive mission to up the challenge. Finding the spot on the map for the story mission (there are 40 in total) is simple enough, but getting to it is increasingly difficult when 10 or more bad guys guard the location. Still, the sticky electrical grenade—though draining on your power supply—is always useful against large mobs. But even that's not always enough against the teleporting Conduits, the Dustmen's enormous trash golems, or the Brotherhood's invisible, shotgun-wielding Conduits. Fortunately, a forgiving checkpoint system ensures you don't need to do too much backtracking if you die.

FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Though some of the side missions really feel like busywork for a superhero, and several are quite repetitive, the core story missions are more consistently inventive, involving defending a ruined prison from a massive assault to figuring out how to take down huge, shielded hot air balloons. They all lead to a confrontation with each island's leader, battles



Healing injured civilians is a quick way to raise your karma level—and your heroic reputation.



Cole's Shockwave ability, granted early in the game, can hurl aside cars, enemies, and even incoming rockets.

KNOW YOUR POWERS

Over the course of the game, Cole earns an impressive roster of abilities, which include:

Lightning Bolt: Cole's standard ranged attack.

Shockwave: A concussive blast that sends everything sprawling.

Overload Burst: A lightning blast that chains off conductive surfaces. (Good only.)

Arc Lightning: A continuous burst of lightning that can branch to hit multiple enemies. (Evil only.)

Shock Grenade: Energy grenades that stick to enemies. Fun, but imprecise.

Megawatt Hammer: Like a rocket launcher that hurls balls of lightning.

Thunder Drop: Charge this up while falling, and you'll unleash a shockwave when you hit the ground.

Electric Drain: Cole replenishes his energy by drawing it from electrical sources; upgrade this to draw it faster.

Polarity Wall: A bulletproof shield that hovers in front of Cole.

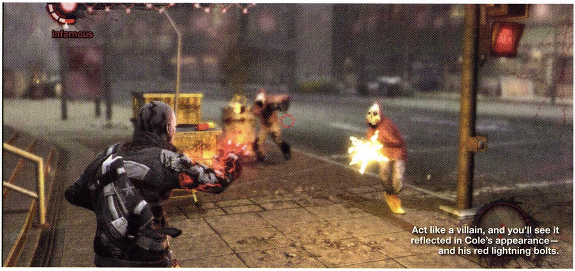
Pulse Heal: See a downed civilian? Use this to earn good karma.

Bio Leech: Used to bleed civilians or enemies dry for an energy boost and quick bad karma.

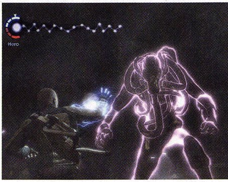
Arc Restraint: Cuffs enemies for a good-karma capture.

Precision: Works like a sniper rifle, slowing time and zooming in close for long-range shots.

Lightning Storm: Call down a massive electrical strike to fry whatever's in your path.



Act like a villain, and you'll see it reflected in Cole's appearance—and his red lightning bolts.



that are elaborate, memorable, and feature some of the least frustrating quick-time events we've seen in years.

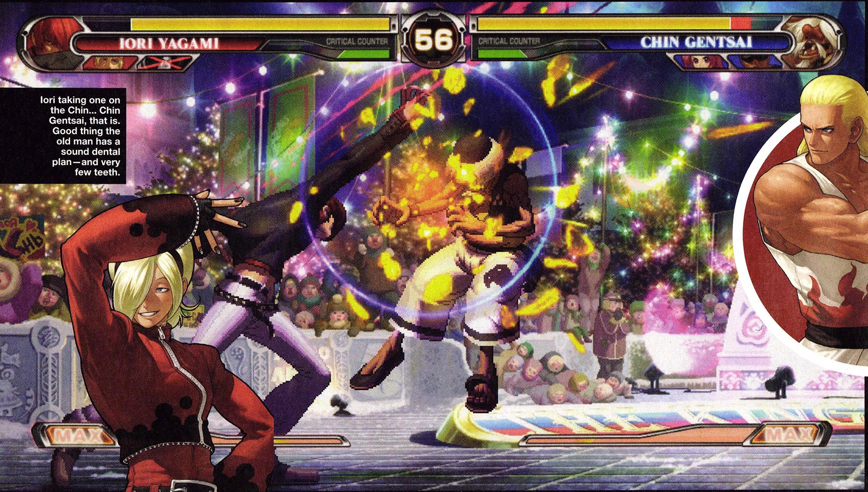
As the game progresses, and Cole's powers grow, his improved abilities ramp up the fun factor. The basic shockwave can be memorable in its own right, particularly when you time blasting a trash can onto a group of Reapers for a multiple takedown. But calling down massive lightning strikes that destroy everything in their path (and can be directed using the Sixaxis control) is its own special joy.

This steady progression contributes to keeping *inFamous* fresh enough, even when the cookie-cutter urban city planning has made most street corners look very similar, each plaza unremarkable from the next. Pursuing the side missions such as destroying surveillance panels on a building or escorting prisoners (and jumping around the city to find "blast shards" from the explosion) pads out a core experience that lasts around 10 to 12 hours. It's time pretty well spent, improving as it goes. You can't help but feel that some locations would have benefitted from greater polish, which would have generated more original and engaging side missions. But there's no doubt that, should you be as compelled as I to follow the good path, you'll get a real kick out of citizens applauding and taking your picture as you pass by. Or you can make them cower, terrified of your glowing red lightning bolts, and to get all the Trophies you'll need to pursue the dark path.

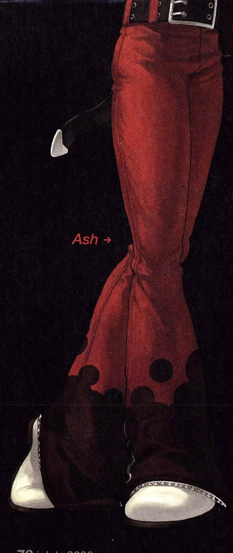
The game's comic book-style reinforces your superhero status and its requisite personal dilemmas, so you have to decide for yourself if you're up for the responsibility of wielding such great power. But *inFamous* is an entertaining, colorful, occasionally terrific romp that provides a solid basis for what we hope is an ongoing, evolving franchise.

★★★★

PLATFORM: PS3 **AVAILABLE:** JULY **GENRE:** FIGHTING **PUBLISHER:** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT **DEVELOPER:** SNK PLAYMORE



Iori taking one on the Chin... Chin Gentsai, that is. Good thing the old man has a sound dental plan—and very few teeth.



Ash →

12 REASONS WHY KING OF FIGHTERS XII WILL RULE OVER STREET FIGHTER IV!

BY TIMOTHY CALUNOD (SELF-CONFESSED HARDCORE KOF FAN)

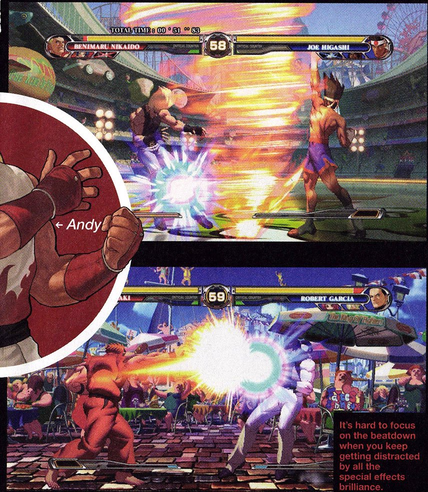
Capcom versus SNK. It's one of the longest standing rivalries in the fighting game genre. For fight fans, especially in the U.S., *Street Fighter* is the people's champion—the popular, mainstream fighting game of choice. But *King of Fighters* aficionados would argue that theirs is the more discerned selection. *Street Fighter* has already made its triumphant next-gen return, but *The King of Fighters XII* is preparing to face off against its old nemesis yet again. Here are 12 reasons why the victor hasn't already been decided.

I: Hand-drawn in

Unlike *Street Fighter IV,* which uses a stylized effect to make the graphics appear hand-drawn, *The King of Fighters XII* is completely hand-drawn, and you immediately appreciate it as you see the fluidity of the characters' movements. But nothing illustrates the visual effects difference more than each fighter's special attacks, such as Benimaru's lightning or Athena's psychic power.

II: Smooth operators

Even though our hands-on *KoF* time was with a non-final beta version, the game plays smoother than *SF IV.* The seamless flow of the game makes you forget this is a 2D game and you can almost feel the fighters' presence as you move, dodge, and attack. Combine that with the lightning fast gameplay speed and the clarity of the hi-def visuals and you've got yourself an amazing fight you won't care to win or lose, just as long as you get to play.



It's hard to focus on the beatdown when you keep getting distracted by all the special effects brilliance.

III: **Audience participation**
Did we mention the amazing graphics? One element we've always appreciated in *KoF* games is the animated audience in the background, and this continues to be true to the nth degree. High definition details and plenty of background action in scenes like the Paris café beat the back alleys and airstrips in *SF IV* any day.

IV: **A unified vision**
Because the same artist recreated the characters, backgrounds, and just about everything in the visuals, you get a clean, elegant experience when playing. Unlike the jarring shift of animated story to polygon fights in *SF IV, KoF* transitions from openings to tournaments to cutscenes as one consistent stylistic view. Thus, you're never taken out of the fantasy until you turn the game off.

V: **Fantastic finishes**
Nothing says gorgeous like the flash and style of a finishing move, but when these fighters execute their actions, it isn't a mere polygon-fest but a captivating sequence of jump-off-the-screen explosions, that also signs your opponent's death warrant. And with these hand-drawn graphics, you can't believe how vivid something like Mature's vicious Deicide can be until you experience it.

VI: **Supporting Cast**
Although Capcom has constantly expanded the *SF* universe via their other games, such as including Rolento and Guy from *Final Fight,* SNK has mastered this technique, blending from their library of fighters to excellent effect. A mix of classic and contemporary characters fills the new roster, including Goro Daimon from the original game, Andy Bogard from *Fatal Fury,* and Duolon and Shen Woo, last seen in *KoF XI.* One new character to the series is Raiden, also known as Big Bear from *Fatal Fury,* and while Mature and Elisabeth aren't new to the franchise, they'll be in the PS3 game after missing out on the arcade version. With such a wide range of character choices, rookies and veterans alike will enjoy the new potential team variations.

VII: **Work with whom you know**
Speaking of teams, this year's entry has no set teams, and thus you can handpick your task force for the tournament. A favorite lineup of ours has always been Terry, Kyo, and Ryo. Predictable, yes, but it gets the job done. Another advantage is two-on-two battles. *SF IV* can't even come close to that sort of action.

VIII: **Run like you mean it**
KoF has always possessed a realistic feel, especially each fighter's defensive maneuvers, such as their backstep and roll evasions. Throw in a counter-defense maneuver that works with your blocking and you've got the makings of a surprise and foil chain that isn't easily predicted or overturned. Just don't block too early or you'll be the surprised one.

IX: **Practice makes perfect**
Our favorite mode for perfecting moves is in the practice sessions, and *KoF* allows you to make your opponent fight, use max gauges, and set simple special move modes to try out and raise your skill for every fighter's repertoire. And you get backgrounds, not the holodeck like in *SF IV.*

X: **Rebuttal, please**
A new addition is the simple Critical Counter, which allows you to chain moves together for more devastating effect. The mode even indicates the remaining time, so you can get your last super move in before it runs out. Overall, it's easier to work with than the complex bars and gauges of previous games.

XI: **Clan-destine exclusive**
The PS3 version of *KoF XII* sports an exclusive online "clan" feature—a first for a fighting game. Three players each choose their favorite character, strategize before the match via voice chat, and then square off against a rival team. A clan leaderboard will let everyone know which squad reigns supreme. You read it here first.

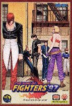
XII: **15-year anniversary: You're crystal!**
Let's face it, *KoF* has had 12 versions to date; *SF,* only four. *KoF* has also had arcing storylines that conclude, and full fight fests between storylines, making it a great tradition to follow. And every version, like the new one, keeps upping the ante more. ■

BLOW BY BLOW: *THE RISE OF A KING*

KOF '94
The introduction of the 3-on-3 battle system, using characters from various existing SNK games.

KOF '95
The first *KoF* storyline, the Orochi Saga. Also introduced editable teams.

KOF '96
Continuation of the Orochi Saga and emergency evasion moves added.

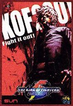


KOF '97
Orochi Saga ends, Advanced and Extra Modes featured.

KOF '98
First fighting-only installment, no storyline but contained characters from past games.

KOF '99
New storyline, the NESTS Chronicles, and the Striker system adds a fourth member to each team.

KOF '00
The NESTS Chronicles continues, with new Active Striker characters.



KOF '01
The NESTS Chronicles ends, the 4-on-4 Tactical Order System introduced, and the Wire Damage attack system introduced.

KOF '02
The second fighting-only game, and a return to the 3-on-3 format with the additions of Quick Emergency Evasion and Quick MAX Evasion.

KOF '03
Tactical Leader System and Multi-Shift added, and the new Ash storyline begins.

KOF XI
Ash storyline continues after a brief hiatus, and Quick Shift, Saving Shift, Skill Bar, and Dream Cancels introduced.

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RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

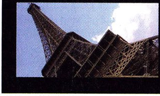
★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

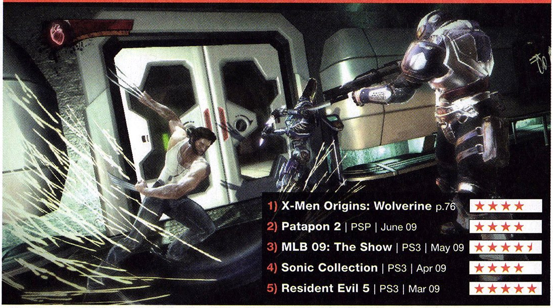
★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!



Win junk from Rob's desk! We'll select one winner from emails that correctly identify the three photos from our Rating scale and explain how they're related. Send your answers with the subject line "July Ratings" to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

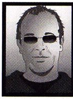
Hot 5 List Top Picks from Recent Issues



1)	**X-Men Origins: Wolverine** p.76	★★★★
2)	**Patapon 2** | PSP | June 09	★★★★
3)	**MLB 09: The Show** | PS3 | May 09	★★★★½
4)	**Sonic Collection** | PS3 | Apr 09	★★★★
5)	**Resident Evil 5** | PS3 | Mar 09	★★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

This month, *inFamous* has the PTOM crew pondering their superpower of choice.



ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rob covets the ability to see, say, 30 minutes into the future. It's long enough to see a train coming, or get the winner of the Kentucky Derby and still place a bet, but not so long as to get spooked by what's happening to everyone around you. Of course, what Rob didn't factor in is that he's always running 30 minutes late, which essentially neutralizes his precognitive superpower. Oh, the irony.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA 09, inFamous, Wheel of Fortune* (for the Trophies), *Killzone 2*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

When Teresa was a little girl, she had a dream. She dreamt she was flying, above tall redwoods, through the clouds, and into the stars. So even though there are better superpowers (mind-reading, super strength, the ability to create chocolate spontaneously), that's the one Teresa would pick. Wingless flight (and being able to breathe in space and uh, not get cold).

NOW PLAYING: *Worms, Flower, Wheel of Fortune, Valkyria Chronicles, Resident Evil 5*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

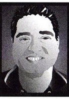
There are any number of soccer-related superpowers that Ken desires: the ability to bend it like Beckham, ball handle like Ronaldinho, dominate Rob in *FIFA 09*... (Oops, scratch that one and put it in the "done" column.) But the only superpower of any real use to him would be the ability to get editors to turn their copy in on time. But alas, there are some things that even superheroes cannot change.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 09*

CARLOS RUIZ
INTERN

Not that Carlos the Intern needs any help or anything, but he would like his power to be the ability to transform into the most interesting man in the world, like that guy from the Dos Equis commercial. He hasn't yet reached the state in which bulls refuse to fight him, but he *can* grow wicked sideburns. We're pretty sure that counts.

NOW PLAYING: *F.E.A.R. 2, Penny Arcade Adventures: Episode 1, Overlord: Raising Hell*



ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

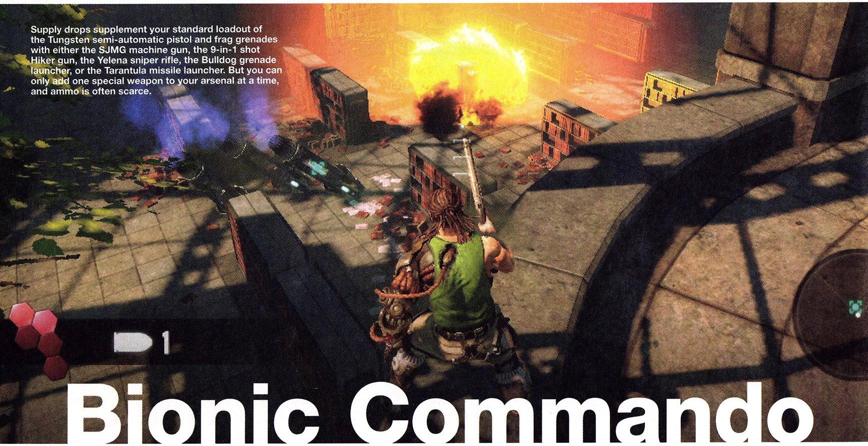
Roger initially wanted the power to actually win an argument with his wife, but then he thought he'd better be more realistic about this. So he opted to procure Batman's superpower, which when you think about it, is simply being rich. Buying cool toys and staying up all night to play with them? Yup, that definitely seems doable...and familiar.

NOW PLAYING: *Bionic Commando, Worms, LEGO Batman, Madden NFL 09*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

While Scott did briefly flirt with the idea adopting a "real" power (like stopping time), he decided to go with something a bit more… non-traditional: the ability to comprehend and fluently speak any language. He'd be the ultimate diplomat, travel with ease, always have job options, and be the life of every party. Practical *and* awesome!

NOW PLAYING: *Rock Band Unplugged, Guitar Hero: Metallica, inFamous, Killzone 2*

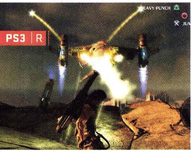


Supply drops supplement your standard loadout of the Tungsten semi-automatic pistol and frag grenades with either the SJMG machine gun, the 9-in-1 shot Hiker gun, the Yelena sniper rifle, the Bulldog grenade launcher, or the Tarantula missile launcher. But you can only add one special weapon to your arsenal at a time, and ammo is often scarce.

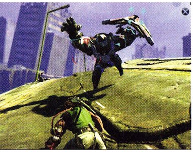
Bionic Commando

Less than the sum of its technologically-advanced parts

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: GRIN



A certain routineness settles into the gameplay until you encounter "bosses" like this Buraq tilt-rotor gunship.



The various Biomech classes in the game aren't as deadly as they appear—thanks to a glaring vulnerability.

Oh, the weight of great expectations. If *Bionic Commando* were created by "Random Game Company X," its shortcomings might be somewhat forgivable. But there's a certain level of polish and accomplishment—a standard, if you will—we expect from Capcom games. And despite *BC's* visible level of technical acumen, questionable design decisions combined with an outrageous game ending have produced one of the most frustrating and disappointing games in recent memory.

Just look at these screenshots. Pretty, aren't they? *BC* looks even prettier when it's up and running on your hi-def TV screen. The graphics are a cut above what you'll encounter in most next-gen games and reflective of what we expect from Capcom. The art direction in particular is noteworthy, resulting in anime-military-cool gear, like the leviathan Constructor that serves as the bad guys' base of operations. Watching the crab-like behemoth lumber across the landscape had us tweaking our nerd nipples from the get-go, and *then* we got to climb aboard the sucker... But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Bionic Commando begins with the destruction of the fictional Ascension City by a terrorist group's weapon of mass destruction. Enter Nathan Spencer, a soldier jailed by his own government after it slapped a bionic arm on him, used him for their nefarious purposes, and then decided that such implants should be deemed illegal. The government now wants Spencer to investigate what went down in Ascension City and coaxes him with promises of information about his missing wife, Emily. Yeah, we didn't much care either—let's just get to the killing.

Control issues

You'd think they'd get the swinging-thing right. Even *Spider-Man,* for which we had lower expectations, got it right. When you're swinging through a decimated city, trying to save the world from baddies, you don't really want to worry whether that ledge your shootin' for is six-inches beyond the reach of your extendable arm, or whether your approach angle is going to totally kill your momentum, or whether that slightly mistimed release just sealed your doom. How about making it so you merely have to aim at some random attach point with the ability to adjust on the fly? That way it's easy to focus on offing enemies—which is the point, isn't it? Instead, you get the digital equivalent of tapping your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time while calculating the effects of wind speed on your reentry trajectory. And yet after a while, you somehow manage it. But there's never a feeling of accomplishment, only the vague notion that you've somehow adapted yourself to an ill-conceived system.

But even as you become acclimated to *BC's* core mechanics, there's a growing realization of just how unremarkable the overall gameplay experience really is. The environments seem expansive and open, but irradiated areas ensure you stick on a singular path. Enemies range from grunts to standard mechs to tougher flying mechs, all of whom possess readily transparent weaknesses, and all of whom reappear constantly throughout the game with the only variable being their numbers. The only real challenges are managing your ammo supply and navigating the levels without accidently killing yourself. In fact, it's amazing how often there are great stretches of levels where you encounter no enemies at all.

Spoiled rotten

The only semblances of memorable moments in *Bionic Commando* are the infrequent "boss battles" against tougher enemies. Consider the **SPOILER-ALERT** siren sounded for the rest of this review, but there's an entertaining showdown with a Buraq tilt-rotor gunship backed by several flying Polycraft mechs, an epic encounter with a giant, mechanical *Dune*-like worm/drill, and a nice change of pace gunship-to-gunship airborne chase sequence, but it's all diminishing returns by the time you face off against Groeder, the distinctly Nazi-esque second-in-command bad guy. Seemingly invincible at first, the key is to run around for several long-ish minutes until his "vulnerability" magically reveals itself—repeat about five times and you're golden. Which brings us to the ending...

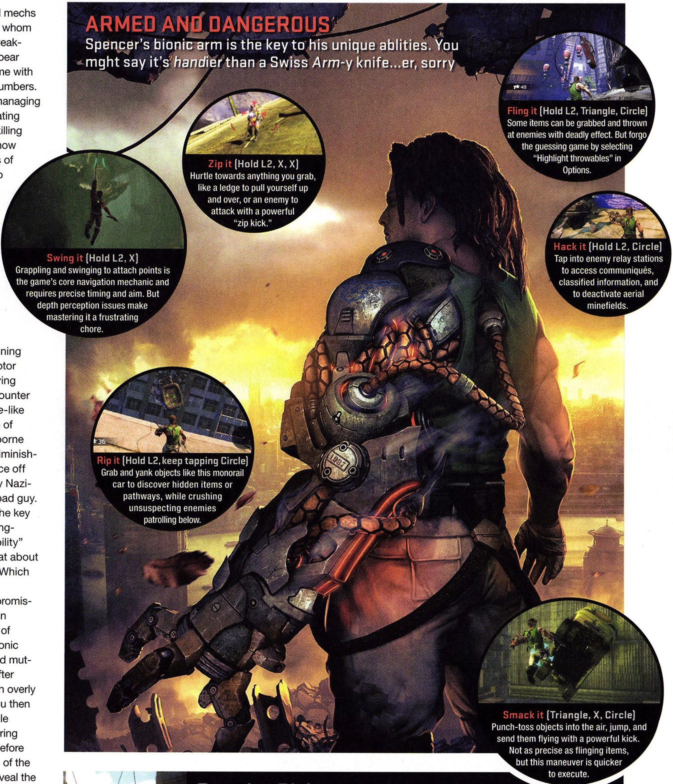
The final sequence begins promisingly enough with the revelation of a "Vulture Army" consisting of thousands of angel-winged Bionic enemies. You even chuckle and mutter, "only 9,999 more to go," after disposing of the first one via an overly simplistic quick-time event. You then latch on to another Vulture while falling and repeat the wing-tearing action only *three* more times before finding yourself in the clutches of the final boss, who proceeds to reveal the game's major plot point, the fate of Spencer's missing wife. The revelation so infuriates Spencer that he head butts the boss to death and they fall to their (presumed) demise...ALL IN A CINEMATIC CUTSCENE! Fade to black. Roll credits. Game over. It's shocking, infuriating, and inexcusable.

Oh, Capcom. How are the mighty fallen—like Spencer, into the drink, after missing a grapple. **Roger Burchill**

★★½

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

Spencer's bionic arm is the key to his unique ablities. You mght say it's *handier* than a Swiss *Arm*-y knife...er, sorry



Zip it [Hold L2, X, X]
Hurtle towards anything you grab, like a ledge to pull yourself up and over, or an enemy to attack with a powerful "zip kick."

Fling it [Hold L2, Triangle, Circle]
Some items can be grabbed and thrown at enemies with deadly effect. But forgo the guessing game by selecting "Highlight throwables" in Options.

Swing it [Hold L2, X]
Grappling and swinging to attach points is the game's core navigation mechanic and requires precise timing and aim. But depth perception issues make mastering it a frustrating chore.

Hack it [Hold L2, Circle]
Tap into enemy relay stations to access communiqués, classified information, and to deactivate aerial minefields.

Rip it [Hold L2, keep tapping Circle]
Grab and yank objects like this monorail car to discover hidden items or pathways, while crushing unsuspecting enemies patrolling below.

Smack it [Triangle, X, Circle]
Punch-toss objects into the air, jump, and send them flying with a powerful kick. Not as precise as flinging items, but this maneuver is quicker to execute.

Fragging Rights

While there's nothing particularly unique about *Bionic Commando's* multiplayer offerings, the single-player gameplay complaints are muted considerably when the focus shifts to PvP or team-based combat. Balance issues may ultimately emerge as Bionic attacks do seem more powerful and effective than using weapons, but on the whole it's good ol' fashioned multiplayer mayhem with the added wild card of the grapple/swing-mechanic. Here's a breakdown of the features:

PLAYERS: Up to eight

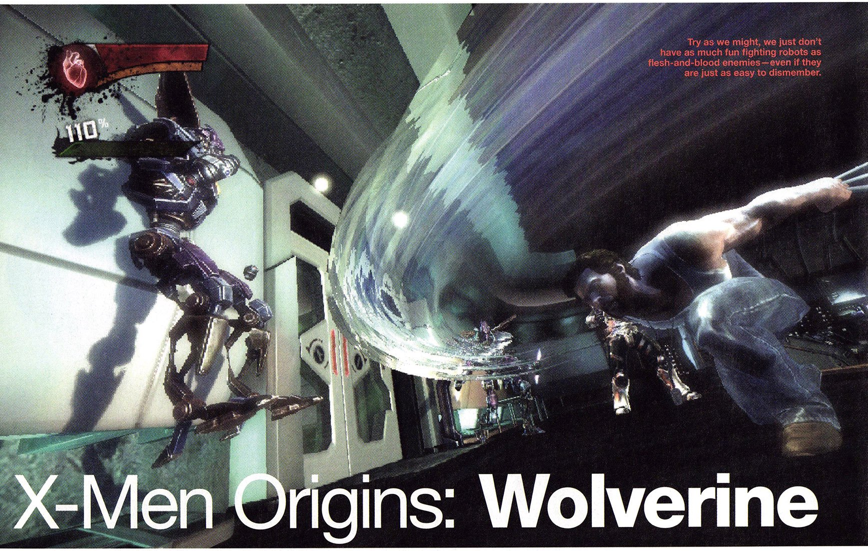
CONNECTION: Online or LAN

MODES:
- Deathmatch
- Team Deathmatch
- Capture the Flag

SETTING OPTIONS:
- Frags – Up to 50
- Time – 5 to 30 minutes
- Captures – Up to 20

12 DM MAPS:
- Island
- Train Station
- Slipped
- Highway
- Grinhouse
- Elevation!
- The Midway
- Eight Bit
- Vertigo
- Captain's Domain
- Vegetation Nation
- Crumble

4 CTF MAPS:
- Industrial
- Rumble in the Ravine
- Scorched Earth
- Subsurface



Try as we might, we just don't have as much fun fighting robots as flesh-and-blood enemies—even if they are just as easy to dismember.

X-Men Origins: **Wolverine**

PS3 | R

The best there is at what it does...for now

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Raven Software

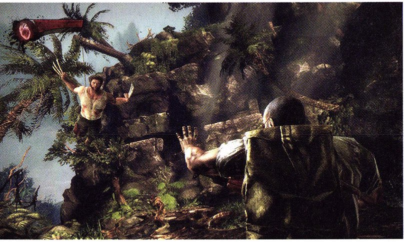
The next *God of War* might still be a ways off, but *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* is here now, and—surprise!—it's a pretty respectable substitute. Far from being just another crappy movie-licensed *X-Men* game, *Origins* is a badass hack-and-slasher that combines sky-high production values, inventive level design, and buckets of spurting gore to create not only the first good Wolverine game in recent memory, but also one of the finest slash-'em-ups on the PS3.

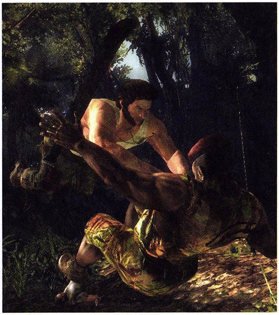
Spanning two separate time periods ("present day" and "three years earlier"), *Origins* follows Wolverine (aka Logan) as he escapes the Weapon X facility and embarks on a quest for revenge against former comrades Sabretooth and Stryker. The story frequently fades into flashbacks, during which bone-clawed Logan and his Team X military unit storm African ruins filled with mercenaries and machete-wielding mutants. No matter what time period you're in, your task remains the same: lay into squads of enemies claws-first and leave tattered, bloody chunks scattered everywhere.

Part of what makes *Origins* compelling is the way it revels in its gore. You can slash an enemy a few times and maybe lop off an arm, but the "speed kill" grab-fatalities enable Logan to shear off heads, impale enemies with their own weapons, and beat them to death with severed limbs. Hurling enemies into environmental hazards is horrific good fun, a flying lunge attack can rapidly end baddies from a distance, and unlocking Wolverine's more advanced moves (through a simple, RPG-style leveling system) enables you to execute, say, a claw-drill attack that sends body parts flying.

Even Wolverine himself is a gruesome showcase. Taking damage rips apart Wolverine's skin, exposing muscles and bone until his mutant healing factor can knit the wounds back together. It's a striking effect, and given how tough Wolverine is, it drives home a feeling of invincibility. That isn't to say he's actually invincible—taking too much damage

Wolverine's lunge attack is key to closing and killing over long distances in a hurry.





This attack may not appear all that brutal, but rest assured, the kills get a whole lot bloodier than this.

Smell their fear

If you're lost, facing invisible enemies, or just want to see hidden points of interest/danger, switch on Wolverine's "enhanced senses" to see the world as he smells it. Your surroundings get a little blurry, but traps, important items, and bad guys are highlighted in bright colors for easy avoidance/interaction/gutting, and a floating scent trail points to your next objective.

exposes his vital organs, and once *they* take too much damage, he'll die. Not exactly canon, but less boring than straight-up invulnerability.

It's worth noting the gore isn't a smokescreen for subpar or repetitive gameplay. Although later levels' tendency to pile on hordes of enemies gets tedious, there's plenty of variety to keep the combat fresh, and it's hard to get bored when you're asked to tear apart helicopters or leap through a high-speed truck convoy. Also, as tough as Logan is, he can't go toe-to-toe with hulking foes like Leviathan or Wendigo, which force him to clamber onto their backs and stab wildly to do damage. Never mind the fight against a ginormous robot Sentinel, which culminates in a ridiculous skydiving battle.

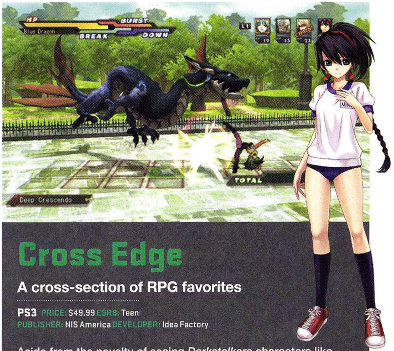
There's also a lot more to the game than just combat, as each smartly designed level is filled with cool puzzles, mostly of the block-pushing, climbing, and jumping varieties. They aren't exactly intellectually taxing, but figuring out where to plug in a power cell or how best to position a laser shield are fun diversions from constantly leaping around and eviscerating hapless mercs.

Surprisingly lengthy and gruesomely entertaining, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* is a must-play whether you're a fan of Wolverine or of savage buttonmashy action in general. It's rare to see a game this good released alongside a movie—we just hope there are more like it in the works.

Mikel Reparaz

★★★★

If you've seen the *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* movie or its trailers, you know that the helicopter showdown plays prominently. You'll tangle with more than a few choppers in the game, often with surprisingly gruesome results.



Cross Edge

A cross-section of RPG favorites

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: Idea Factory

Aside from the novelty of seeing *Darkstalkers* characters like Morrigan and Felicia alongside the likes of *Disgaea's* Etna and her Prinny army, *Cross Edge* plays like an average RPG. To sum up the story, everyone wakes up with amnesia in a strange world. (That was easy, wasn't it?) As you explore, you must check for hidden "lost souls" by hitting Square over every inch of the terrain, which yields anything from small items to major plot points.

In the turn-based battles, each character has various attacks mapped to the face buttons and has a set amount of action points to spend each turn. Once you attack, you have a limited amount of time to choose your next action, and the goal is to chain specific attacks to create combos. The feeling of momentum while building powerful chains is satisfying, especially when you regain action points by breaking an enemy's guard, allowing your assault to snowball.

From dialogue that loads one line at a time to the lack of PS3-level graphics (high-res static art aside), everything seems like a remnant from the early 2000s. *Cross Edge* is for fans of the franchises it draws its characters from, but ultimately that's its greatest flaw—it doesn't quite live up to the standards from which it was born.

Carolyn Gudmundson

★★★

Who's who

The number of characters you recognize on the *Cross Edge* roster is a gauge of how likely you'll enjoy the game.

Mana Khemia 2: Raze, Lily, Whim

Atelier Marie: Marie

Darkstalkers: Demitri, Morrigan, Lilith, Felicia

Ar tonelico: Lyner, Aurica, Misha, Shurelia

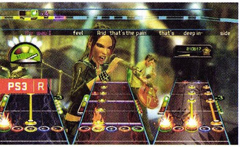
Disgaea: Etna, Prinny

Spectral Souls: Zelos, Meu

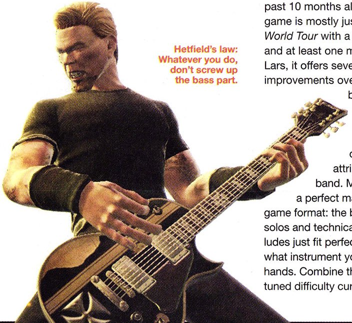
All-new characters: York, Miko, May

Morrigan
HP 13752/ 13752
LV 56 AP 26

Guitar Hero: Metallica



Gems that represent notes scroll down...aw, you know how it works.



Hetfield's law: Whatever you do, don't screw up the bass part.

Riding the lightning all the way to the bank

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 (extra drum pedal sold separately) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Neversoft

Metallica fans ought to be pleased: *Guitar Hero: Metallica* is arguably the best entry into the franchise since Harmonix passed the torch to Neversoft two years ago (quite a feat considering it's the third *Guitar Hero* title to be released in the past 10 months alone). Though the game is mostly just *Guitar Hero: World Tour* with a lot of extra skulls and at least one more dude named Lars, it offers several marked improvements over the first full-band *Guitar Hero.*

Unsurprisingly, many of the game's strengths can be directly attributed to the titular band. Metallica's music is a perfect match for the music game format: the blistering guitar solos and technical melodic interludes just fit perfectly, regardless of what instrument you've got in your hands. Combine that with a finely tuned difficulty curve and you've got some of the best musical material in a rhythm game to date.

The overall presentation benefits from the metal makeover as well. Adequately convincing renders of the band members rock out on album-cover inspired stages with noticeable authenticity thanks to some extensive mo-cap sessions. And each song in the career-spanning set list contains fan-service factoids and extras (like behind-the-scenes videos). It's a Metallica fan's fantasy...in disc form!

The game also features several smaller, non-band-related improvements. It abandons *World Tour's* gig-oriented career mode in favor of a safe, but serviceable, song list set-up similar to the earliest *Guitar Hero* games. The HUD is now significantly better organized, a special "Drum Over" mode that lets you play whatever you like without failing has been added, and the music creation suite has returned...yeah, who cares, but it's there if you want it.

Guitar Hero: Metallica is not without its problems, though. Character customization still lacks real depth, an inane storyline has been shoehorned in, you can't play through the career mode as a band online, and the extra kick pedal added for this game is all but pointless for any but the most hardcore drummers.

But the game's biggest problem isn't quality; it's a question of value. The game disc contains only 49 songs (28 by Metallica and an additional 21 by similar-sounding bands), and not all of them are winners. Plus, the only downloadable content compatible with this game is Metallica's already-available *Death Magnetic.* So basically, you get just 49 tracks with absolutely no potential for growth for $60.

Here's what it comes down to: exactly how much do you love Metallica?

Scott Butterworth

★★★★

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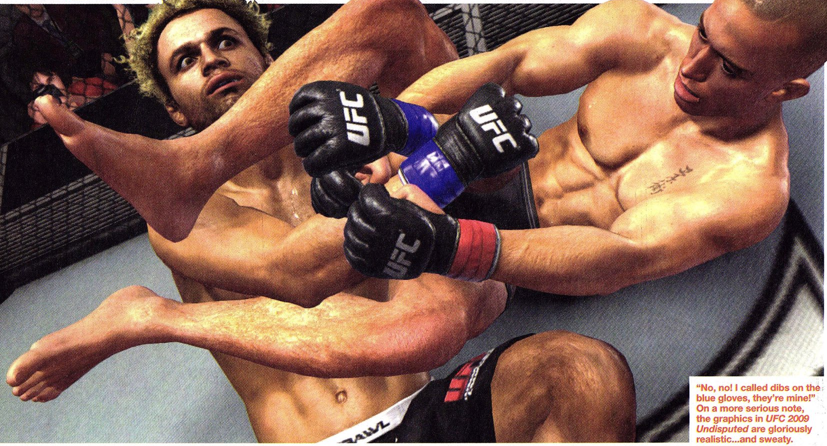


"No, no! I called dibs on the blue gloves, they're mine!" On a more serious note, the graphics in *UFC 2009 Undisputed* are gloriously realistic...and sweaty.

Out of the deluge of UFC, Pride, and MMA games to hit retail over the last decade, one title forever remains our fave: Crave's original Dreamcast release of *Ultimate Fighting Championship.*

UFC 2009 Undisputed

So THQ wants to be a fighter?

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Yuke's Media Creations

PS3 | R

Almost seven years have passed since THQ stepped into the Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) ring with 2003's genre-defining *Pride FC: Fighting Championships* (for PS2), but the publisher is now looking to establish itself as a real threat in the Octagon with *UFC 2009 Undisputed.* And even though the learning curve is steeper than your typical wrestling or boxing game thanks to the dizzying depth in its controls, *UFC 2009 Undisputed* delivers the most functional and entertaining MMA gameplay to come along in years. Developer Yuke's Media Creations has taken the basics from *Pride FC* (deep create-a-fighter mode, great grappling) and overhauled the control scheme, added guest trainers plus a TUF *(The Ultimate Fighter)* Career mode, and turned up the overall level of "awesome!"

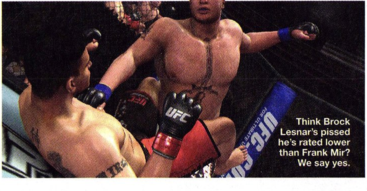
Like 2002's *UFC Throwdown,* you begin the Career with points to spend on buffing your create-a-character fighter as well as a choice of typical UFC mixed martial-arts techniques (think Kickboxing, Muay Thai, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and the like), then it's off to the Octagon to get all sweaty and angry-like. Curiously missing are *UFC* stand-by modes like Arcade, Survival, or the UFC Tournie Mode that we grew to love in titles like 2002's *Tapout,* so you're either relegated to Exhibition mode, Career, or online skirmishes (there's a Classic Fights mode, but it's a mixed bag of neo-Classic UFC bouts, but nothing truly classic like Gracie vs. Severn or Hughes vs. Penn II. Poop.) Oh, well.

The controls are way less *Tekken*-y and best described as *Skate* meets UFC, with the face buttons handling your basic striking, leaving the more technical takedown, transition, and submission moves for trigger, shoulder, and analog stick combos, which works well but takes some serious getting used to. It's hard to learn, harder to master, but once you do, you'll see how rewarding a system it is. Pound for pound, this is the best—albeit the only—*UFC* title of this console generation thus far, but considering that THQ now holds the UFC license thru 2011, *Undisputed* may prove a hard act to follow. Casey Lynch

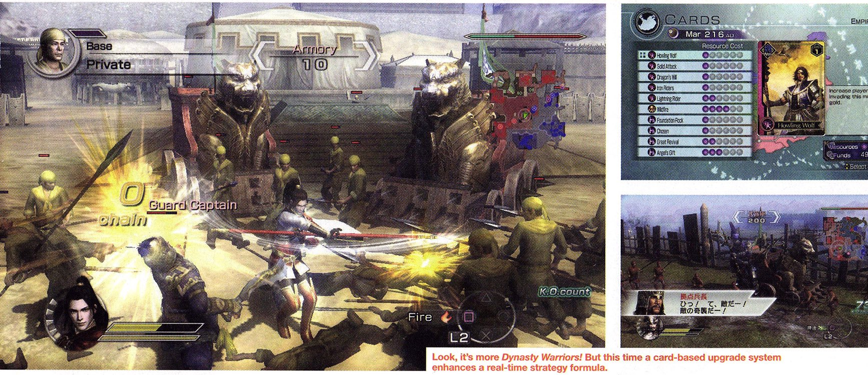
★★★★

Chuck Liddell is old news

Look, the Iceman is obviously the most recognizable UFC fighter ever, but he hasn't done anything noteworthy since his blistering TKO win over Tito Ortiz in 2006, except lose four of his last five bouts, three by way of serious knockout. And yet Lidell is all over *Undisputed,* almost as much as cover athlete and former UFC Light Heavyweight Champion, Forrest Griffin. All props to Liddell, but somebody tell Dana White to put a fork in him, he's done.



Think Brock Lesnar's pissed he's rated lower than Frank Mir? We say yes.



Look, it's more *Dynasty Warriors!* But this time a card-based upgrade system enhances a real-time strategy formula.

Dynasty Warriors 6: **Empires**

Sixth time's a charm! Maybe not

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** KOEI **DEVELOPER:** Omega Force

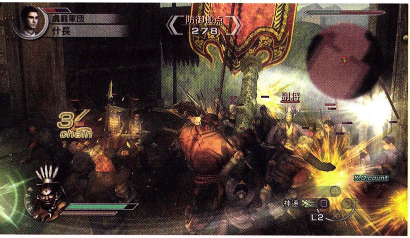
Just in case you're wondering, Japanese publisher KOEI will never stop making *Dynasty Warriors* games. Ever. They'll also never stop spinning the series into countless offshoots, with *Empires* being its RTS-flavored *DW* entry. Really, this could be called *Dynasty Warriors 6: RISK's Ambition,* as it grafts *DW's* patented "bazillion bad guys on-screen at once" motif with the strategy elements of its *Nobunaga's Ambition* franchise and then, just because, also adds in the territory and turn-based elements of the board game RISK. Whatever you call it, if you've played *Dynasty Warriors Empires* 2, *4,* or *5*, you've essentially played this, though there are some features from those aforementioned titles missing here (and believe it or not, they're actually missed), along with a few additions.

For starters, there's really only Empire Mode in *DW6E*, so gone is the Vs. Mode from *DW4E* and the righteous splitscreen Melee mode along with it. Like its predecessors, the gameplay centers on once again gaining control of all 24 territories in China (if only China would just stay united!) You play as either a Ruler or an Officer, and the most noticeable difference to RTS basics is the addition of Council and Strategy cards, which you accumulate each round and which let you assign abilities to your troops. The goal is to conquer bases and capture enemy Officers—you know, the usual stuff.

Generally, this is a pretty novel formula; RTS trappings and resource stocking (you can buy gems to upgrade weapons or horses), Card-based upgrades, and third-person, single-character gameplay. Graphically, the game is a mixed bag. The cutscene intros and prepping menus you'll spend all your planning time in are nicely done, but the battle action is totally *DW,* complete with fog of war and moronic AI. In the end, if romancing the three kingdoms is your thing, you're going to go bananas for this already-established RTS twist on the *DW* franchise. Otherwise, it's totally niche, so approach with caution.

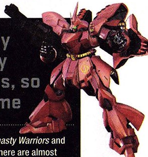
Casey Lynch

★★★



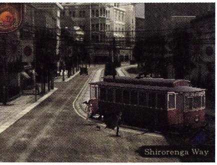
The key to this battle is to swing at everything that moves. Glad we told you?

So many Dynasty Warriors, so little time

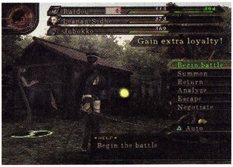


In addition to *Dynasty Warriors* and its sequels *2-6*, there are almost as many *Dynasty Warriors*-themed spin-offs as there are enemies on any given *Dynasty* battlefield; between *Warriors Orochi, Empires, Hyper, Gundam, Strikeforce, Xtreme Legends, Fighter's Battle*, and any special editions (like *Joukan*), you could literally spend years reuniting China across every major handheld and console platform. There's even *Dynasty Warriors Mahjong*. For real.

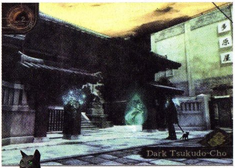
This fresh-faced looker prefers to wear pink when restoring peace and uniting China.

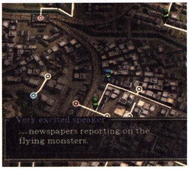

Shirorenga Way

DRAIN!
184
Perhaps another may do

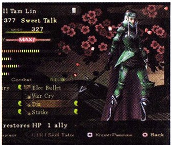

Raidou
Gain extra loyalty!
Begin battle
Summon
Return
Analyze
Escape
Negotiate
Auto
Begin the battle

Raidou
Alraune
Rakshasa
ThE TimE hAs CooOomMMMEE!


Dark Tsukudo-Cho

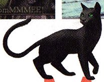

Very excited speaker
...newspapers reporting on the flying monsters.

From ancient shrines to city streets, the traditional Japanese settings have a distinctly historic feel, but are steeped in Western influence.


Tam Lin
377 Sweet Talk
327
MAX!
Elec Bullet
War Cry
Dia
Strike
restores HP 1 ally
Back

Demon Fusion 101

Leery of the potential headache that monster collecting entails? Rest easy, *Devil Summoner 2* streamlines the process beautifully. You can fuse nearly any two demons, and the resulting demon will retain all the abilities of both parent demons. You can even see what the result will be beforehand, eliminating any nasty guesswork. And if you want any demon back after you've fused it, you can re-summon it for a fee.

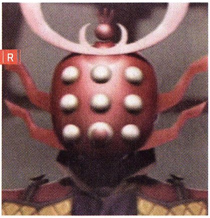


Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner 2

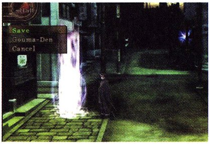
A beauty behind the mask

PS2 **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Atlus **DEVELOPER:** Atlus

PS2 | R



The non-generic anime art style is ethereal and creepy, and the character designs are impressively imaginative.


Save
Gouma-Den
Cancel

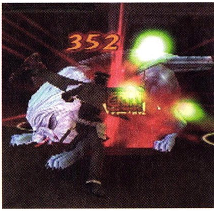
In the demon-infested dark worlds, there are still plenty of opportunities to heal, save, and tinker with your demons.

Equal parts RPG and detective drama, *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner 2's* premise is as captivatingly mish-mashed as its name is long. As Raidou Kuzunoha, 14th descendant in an illustrious line of devil summoners, keeping the peace of the capital is your duty. With your wise feline companion (Atlus loves its cats!), you'll uncover sinister plots involving old family clans, supernaturally lucky sleazebags, and mysterious assassins in league with… masked insects?

Long story short, you work at a detective agency tracking down clues on any potentially shady happenings. Each area you explore has a "dark" counterpart where demons roam free, and you divide time between investigating leads in the "normal" demon-free human world and going to the dark world to sort out the riff-raff and battle or recruit demons. Any time you encounter a demon, you can try negotiating with it instead of fighting. Read its personality correctly, and the demon will join you.

In the real-time battles, you control Raidou while two of your demons carry out any order you give them. It may seem a bit hack-'n'-slashy at first, but there's a lot going on in each battle—hit Circle to attack, X to dodge, Square to fire your gun (helpful to stun certain kinds of teleporting enemies), and Triangle to unleash Raidou's combo attack. Hitting R1 brings up a menu where you swap out your active demons, direct them to use magic attacks, and analyze your enemies' weaknesses.

What makes the battles so fun is that you're constantly swapping out old demons for new ones with bigger and better powers. Sometimes fights can get hectic, and occasionally you can lose track of what's going on, but aside from the occasional moment of confusion, the battle system is one of the better of its kind. RPG vets looking for a challenge should note though that the overall difficulty is quite low throughout, which may leave some unsatisfied.



While it may still be second-best to the *Persona* series in the *Shin Megami Tensei* franchise, *Devil Summoner 2's* dynamic integration of its demon system throughout the game's various aspects works well, and all the characters, whether human, demon or cat, have the level of personality necessary for a great RPG. Add the ongoing mystery element, and it's hard not to be taken in by the eerie lullaby of this world's secrets.

Carolyn Gudmundson

★★★★

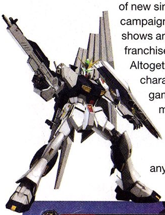
Masks are a huge motif in *Devil Summoner 2*. Masks are always creepy. Even the ones that look like watermelons.

Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2

Kill the Zakus! Kill the Zakus! An' kill the Zakus!

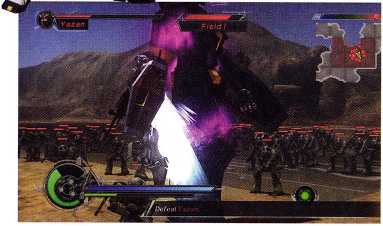
PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Teen** PUBLISHER: **KOEI** DEVELOPER: **Omega Force**

Does the name "Char Aznable" ring a bell? No? How about Heero Yuy? Domon Kasshu? If not, move on. *Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2* only works if you come to it with an emotional investment in the license. For gamers who aren't also big-time *Gundam* fans, it's just another example of *Dynasty Warriors* warmed over, and there's too much of that on the market already. For the die-hard *Gundam* fans, though, it's a heck of a good time.

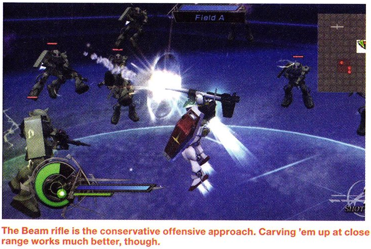


KOEI's second go at *Dynasty Warriors* with giant robots adds a ton of new single-player features, including story-driven campaigns based on all the classic *Gundam* TV shows and mecha drawn from nearly 30 years of the franchise, all the way up to *Gundam Seed Destiny.* Altogether, there are roughly three times as many characters and robots to pick from as in the first game. The two-player mode is a disappointment—it doesn't have a proper co-op mode, just three different head-to-head competitive games. When it comes to pure *Gundam* geekery, though, there still isn't anything better than this. D. F. Smith

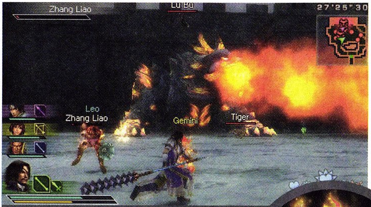
★★★

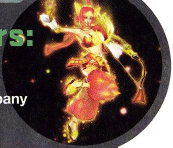


Char Aznable: the Red Comet of the Principality of Zeon, greatest ace of the One Year War. No, you didn't really need to know that.



The Beam rifle is the conservative offensive approach. Carving 'em up at close range works much better, though.





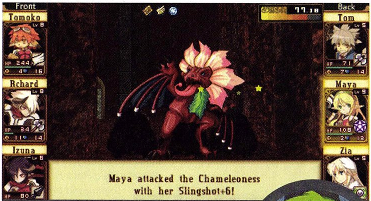
Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce

Same old, but more fun with company

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: KOEI DEVELOPER: Omega Force

Because somebody must have demanded it, here's another *Dynasty Warriors* for the PSP, this time with a four-player co-op mode. It's a good idea—like 3D *Gauntlet* in ancient China—but it only does so much to revive what's still a tired hack-'n'-slash franchise. The core *Dynasty* combat system has needed a serious shaking-up for years now, and even the new RPG-style character-building element isn't enough to fix that. D. F. Smith

★★



Maya attacked the Chameleoness with her Slingshot+6!

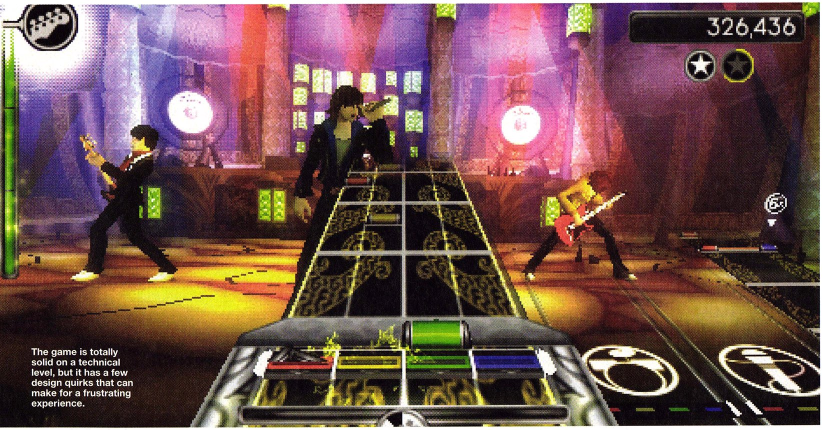
Class of Heroes

A lesson in tedium

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: Atlus DEVELOPER: Acquire/Zerodiv

A dungeon-crawler that revels in its own sadism, *Class of Heroes* uses its boarding school setting to justify endless tutorials on its opaque mechanics. Everything from assembling a decent party to building a strong character to following mission orders is frustratingly convoluted. And the random dungeons? Let's just say they're frequently punishing. Niche-dwelling masochists will thrive on mastering the murky depths of *Heroes,* but everyone else should throw a smoke bomb and run away. Carolyn Gudmundson

★½



The game is totally solid on a technical level, but it has a few design quirks that can make for a frustrating experience.

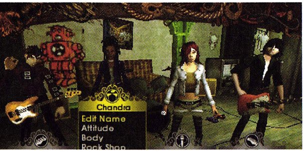
Rock Band Unplugged

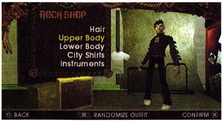
Just *slightly* out of tune

PSP **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** MTV Games **DEVELOPER:** Harmonix/Backbone Entertainment

PSP | R

Convincing your brain that left is red and not, um, *left* can be tricky.





The music genre got crowded awfully fast, didn't it? Which would be fine except for the fact that many of the games are essentially identical: scrolling notes, fake plastic instruments, embarrassing karaoke, and so on. So the cleverly titled *Rock Band Unplugged* offers a breath of fresh air by eliminating the peripherals and introducing a (relatively) new mechanic that the developers refer to as "plate spinning."

You'll still be matching scrolling notes using the PSP's face buttons, but rather than playing a single instrument, you'll control all four parts—bass, guitar, drums, and vocals—over the course of a song by jumping between the various tracks using the shoulder buttons. But while this mechanic is as engaging as it sounds, it also has its drawbacks.

See, before switching to a new track, you must complete a certain phrase of notes—play it perfectly and the game will stop feeding you notes, forcing you to switch to a different instrument to keep the song going. If you miss even a single note in the sequence, however, the phrase resets entirely, meaning you have to stay put while the other tracks begin to fail simply because you're ignoring them.

The more you improve, the more fun the game becomes, but getting better can be a long and frustrating process thanks to this phrase system. It's significantly more demanding than the console games, and as a result, it's the type of game that you put down in anger but inevitably feel compelled to pick up again later.

Unfortunately, aggravation isn't the game's only potential weakness. The track list contains just 41 songs, only nine of which are exclusive to *Rock Band Unplugged* (and only for a limited time). While this is expected given that it's a PSP game, it's still a bit disappointing. You'll be able to purchase new tracks through the wireless in-game store, but this isn't much consolation considering each song will cost at least an additional $0.99.

It also doesn't help that the gameplay never really evolves. Arguably, it doesn't in the console games either, but the lack of multiplayer and rock star fantasy immersion really magnifies that fact here. A simplified Band World Tour mode serves as the game's career component, but it's not the same without a fake guitar in your hands.

But vague disappointments aside, *Rock Band Unplugged* offers a clever portable twist on the music game formula that is mostly engrossing and fun…even if it can be damned frustrating.

Scott Butterworth

★★★½

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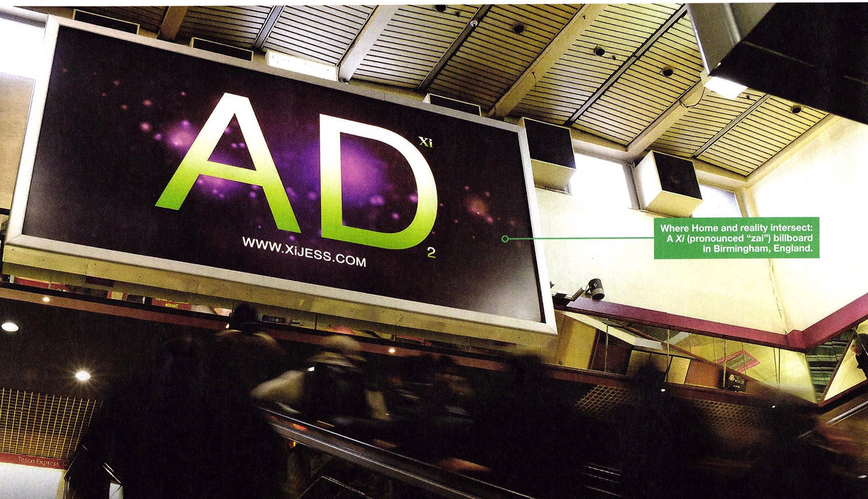


Where Home and reality intersect: A *Xi* (pronounced "zai") billboard in Birmingham, England.

The Truth Behind *Xi*

For a second, your heart stops beating.

"It's just a game," you remind yourself. "Just a game." You're driving down a street, maybe from work or school. For the past few days, you've been logged into the PlayStation Home, trying to unravel the mystery of "Xi" and find Jess, a girl from the United Kingdom who's gone missing. It's a virtual mystery that invites PS3 owners to dive through phony puzzles and games as if there were something serious at stake. It's an Alternate Reality Game [ARG].

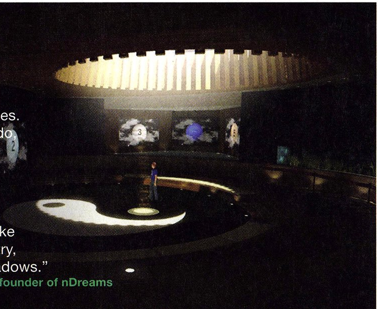
But for a moment, you forget that it's fake, because the billboard you just drove past in real life has the words "www.XiJess.com" scrawled across the bottom.

"It's just a game," you repeat to yourself. But you're not logged into PlayStation Home at the moment... The game has invaded reality. It's become the obsession of millions of PS3 owners across the world.

So we had to talk to the team that made it happen.

A customized summer apartment, decorated for the testers' party. Woohoo, time to dance!

Who's Talking?



And what's nDreams?

"A studio that makes unconventional games. We're always the first to do whatever we do, and we'll never do the same thing twice."
–David Varela, Producer of *Xi*

"We aim to work on innovative titles. We like working on the edges of the games industry, exploring new areas and lurking in the shadows."
– Patrick O'Luanaigh, Creative Director of *Xi* and founder of nDreams

PTOM: How did you come up with the idea of making an ARG for Home?
Patrick O'Luanaigh: I'd seen a presentation about Home at the Edinburgh Interactive Festival in 2007. I was really inspired by the possibilities, so I spoke to some guys I knew at SCEE, and pitched them the idea which formed the basis of *Xi*—a mysterious ARG-style game centred in Home. Fortunately, two visionary guys, Tomas Gillo and Phil Harrison, really bought into it and brought us on board.

David Varela: As soon as I heard about Home, I knew it would be a great platform for an adventure. It's such a good match—Home and ARGs are made for each other.

When did work on this project start?
POL: December 2007. Just over a year before we launched *Xi*. The first six months was spent experimenting; we got the chance to really understand what Home is capable of and then we designed *Xi* around what we'd learned.

How many people worked on Xi?
DV: There was a core team of six. In such a small team, everybody has to multitask, so job descriptions were pretty flexible. We outsourced some of the art, but really, the vast majority of the work was done by six guys in one room.

What was the ultimate goal?
DV: I think we all had our own specific goals. I wanted to tell a good story and give people a fun ride. I think Patrick wanted to show what Home could do in terms of gameplay and technology. Sony wanted us to create a sense of community and get people coming into Home day after day. Ultimately, *Xi* is the videogame equivalent of a soap opera—a game that develops over time and keeps you coming back to find out more.

POL: I'm just hugely proud that *Xi* happened at all. It'll always be the first console-based ARG.

An ARG blurs the line between reality and fiction. Did that make it hard to keep track of what was fiction and what wasn't?
POL: It did get a little crazy at times. We've had players pretending to be characters in the game and sending messages/codes to other players.

DV: When you open up a game into the real world, it gets people questioning everything—you create a heightened state of awareness. People thought they could see *Xi* everywhere. The poor guy who spotted the first *Xi* billboard poster thought he was losing his mind.

What is your favourite object/game/character/whatever in *Xi*?
POL: I loved putting the fish-tank games together, and I'm very pleased with the Alpha Zone 1 games. The karaoke video in the party (which combines green-screen and machinima) is fab. Character-wise, Ignatius is great—he's definitely the character who is the most fun to follow.

DV: I have a soft spot for Stapler the robot. And I loved watching the forums as all the players worked together on the billboard puzzle around the world. But then there's the crane game in Maintenance too… There's too much to choose from.

Any interesting stories about the development of *Xi*?
DV: Every game I work on, I always end up doing the dirty work. I was the one hiding USB flash drives in the mud on Hampstead Heath. I was the one scouting a puzzle trail round the streets of Paris in a blizzard. Next time, I'm going to make sure we're working somewhere tropical...

POL: We've got some great footage of David looking like a drowned rat in Paris! To be honest, *Xi* has been a total blast. Watching the community "live" has to be the best bit—the Billboard puzzle was brilliant as we got to see players working together across multiple languages, dashing around Europe whilst the U.S. community drove them on...

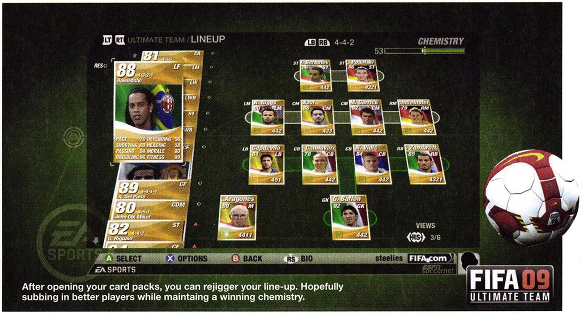
Any plans for the future?
POL: We have lots of ideas for Home post-*Xi*. Home is capable of so much more than you've seen so far; we've only really scratched the surface. We're talking to Sony about a few of the ideas, so if everyone who is enjoying *Xi* can contact Sony and tell them, that would be great.

PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for less than the price of a Sheffield United bobblehead doll. We say Yea or Nay.

+ YEA You'll get full value for your money.

- NAY No legs, no fun, no value.



After opening your card packs, you can rejigger your line-up. Hopefully subbing in better players while maintaining a winning chemistry.

FIFA Ultimate Team

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** EA Sports

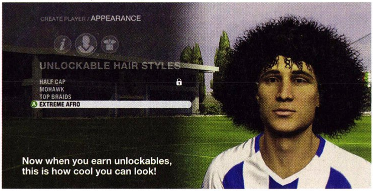
+ Soccer, believe it or not, is a big deal. Sure the U-S-of-"what's soccer?"-A is years away from finding its real world footing among the elite of the beautiful game, but American gamers have clearly embraced EA Sports' sensational sim for its playability and options—the U.S. provides the second largest number of participants in ranked online *FIFA* games. Does that mean the audience will be queuing up to gather cards in *Ultimate Team,* the *FIFA 09* expansion that adds a trading card element to game? Hmm, probably not. This add-on taps into the type of fan appreciation that turns baseball card collecting into a lifelong passion—clearly, it's not for everyone.

The concept is to create a team using trading cards, and then use it in online matches (so you need a copy of *FIFA 09).* But while the game mechanics of assembling a team, applying special cards to boost training, avoiding yellow cards, and the like is deep and involving, it takes time to craft a team you actually want to play. From your starting card packs you get a full team of lower league performers. Sure, the built-in challenge to earn more skill points by winning matches against similarly awful teams provides longevity, but after playing with Champions League contenders (and even Sheffield United), this step down in class takes some working through. After several games, you can use your earned skill points to open "silver" packs of cards with better players and eventually move up to "gold" packs that hopefully hide the stars.

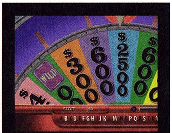
You can take your misfits online against other card-based teams, but the game doesn't seem to match similar abilities, so my boys took one hell of a beating each trip out, playing against teams packed with international stars. How did they get those players so fast? Aside from toiling for skill points, you can also purchase card packs through the PS Store and do what every soccer club really wants to do: buy success.

If you're playing *FIFA* constantly, the $10 initial investment here provides a fresh challenge with strategic depth, but go into it knowing that you need to grind to greatness.

Rob Smith



Now when you earn unlockables, this is how cool you can look!



Wheel of Fortune

PRICE: $14.99

DEVELOPER: Sony Online Ent.

+ *Wheel of Fortune* and I have a love-hate relationship. When I'm winning, I adore it (especially the too-polite expressions of the virtual opponents I know are seething inside). But when I spin two Bankrupts in a row or when another contestant solves the puzzle without giving me a turn at the wheel…it's totally unfair! The injustice is *excruciating.* In fact, I may need to go into therapy to deal with the fury. (Play it and you'll see I'm not exaggerating.)

Like the TV show, you pick letters to spell out words on a board and victory is based on both luck and skill. In fact, it may be too much like the actual show, because contestants (even AI ones) take turns in real time, which means you watch more than you play. Character creation has limited options—all unattractive—so you can't create you, but other than that, the game captures the television experience, complete with accurate sound effects and studio sets (but no Pat or Vanna).

At $14.99, it's pricey, but the easy Trophies and ability to play friends locally or online makes it worth it for *WoF* devotees. Hmm, time to buy my grandparents a PS3.

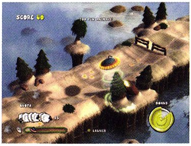
Teresa Dun

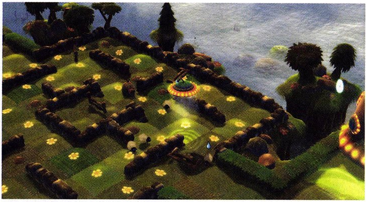
Flock!

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** Proper Games

✚ In *Flock!,* you control a UFO whose sole purpose for existence is to collect farm animals. Wait, it gets even odder. Instead of, say, zapping pigs directly onto your alien base, you have to "herd" them to a nearby mother ship, leading them past precipitous drops, closed gates (which you have to puzzle out a way to open), and hungry predators along the way. To get the beasts to move, you "frighten" them forward with the beam of light on your UFO (told you it got weirder), until they get close enough for the mother ship to suck them in.

The highlights of the game are the plush-style graphics (which are 3D and cartoony) and the adorable antics of the creatures you're herding. The cows throw temper tantrums, the sheep de-poof (shrink) when they touch water, the pigs bounce off terrain objects like marbles in a pinball machine, and the baby chicks flap their mini-wings in ways that can make your heart melt.

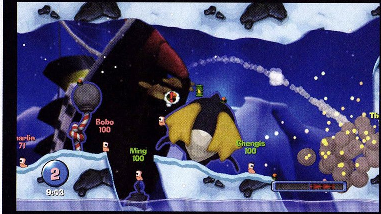


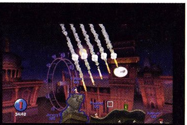


Yet, for all that, farm animals are still, well, pig-headed and bird-brained. Getting them from Point A to Point Mother ship is easy to figure out theoretically (the puzzle element of *Flock!* is a bit too easy), which makes the pain of *executing* those plans all the more irritating. Using your beam to herd the animals is like using a magnet to repel another magnet—it's unrefined and clumsy. You're UFO moves too slowly, and when some of the puzzles require finesse, it gets frustrating…and a game this cute shouldn't be frustrating.

On the other hand, I've got to give credit to a game that can contain the line "Congratulations! You have unlocked…Pile of Poo!" and *still* be adorable. The co-op play (local and online), level editor, Trophies, and humorous little touches (the boy sheep cry when a girl sheep dies!) all make *Flock!* worth exploring, but just know this: next time I meet a sheep in real life, I'm punching it in the face.

Teresa Dun





Worms

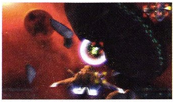
PRICE: $12.99
DEVELOPER: Team 17

✚ Great game designs don't die. They get repackaged for download on the PSN. But nobody should look down upon this stealthy marketing trick, because without it, we couldn't enjoy the simple, deep, funny, and thoroughly addictive classic gameplay of *Worms.* And missing that would be a tragedy.

If this is the first time you've heard of *Worms,* then this 2D strategy/puzzle experience pits your team of annelids against opponent teams in a last-worm-slithering showdown. These particular Worms are armed with bazookas, mines, Uzis, jetpacks, and even beat-'em-up inspired attacks like the fire punch and dragon ball. On destructible 2D maps, they throw explosives at each other, inflicting enough damage to self-destruct, or fly off the side of the map. Sure, it's turn-based. Sure, it's easy to get frustrated making a mistake (like not accounting for the wind, sending a rocket into the air, only to see it home in on you). But truly compelling strategy supported by skill-based judgment makes for an enticing mix…and with Trophies, too!

The price is a bit high for the 20 challenge levels (though the higher difficulty levels ensure replayability) but the core gameplay holds up surprisingly well 14 years after its original appearance on PSone (and numerous other platforms).

Rob Smith



No Gravity: The Plague of Mind (PSP)

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** REALTECH VR

✚ A "mind plague" from outer space has infected human civilization, and you're a pilot sent into the far reaches of the galaxy to investigate who or what is responsible. This 3D shooter has you dogfighting and barrel-rolling through 30+ missions where you shoot bad guys, escort good guys, shoot other bad guys, find missing objects, and shoot more bad guys. The techno soundtrack (very "futuristic") and flashy special effects add atmosphere, but after the first hour, the game loses its freshness. However, 10 bucks for a PSP game (available via download off the PSN) isn't bad. So if you enjoy 3D shooters, you should pick up *No Gravity: The Plague of Mind.*

Teresa Dun

PSN REVIEWS

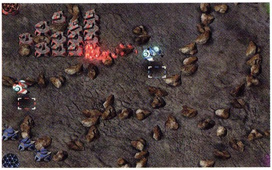
Rag Doll Kung-fu: Fists of Plastic

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** SCEE

− What began life as a rag doll physics demo has finally arrived on PlayStation Network with more a dull squish than a pounding thud. It's significant to PS3 owners as it was the brainchild and experimental project of Mark Healey while he was employed at Peter Molyneux's Lionhead Studios. That name ring a bell? Healey is currently Creative Director at Media Molecule, and you don't need to dig deep among the bones of *Rag Doll Kung-fu* to find traces of Sackboy's DNA.

This throwaway beat-'em-up teaches you its oddball controls through several simple Challenges. Your marionette-like character blends twitchy control with the floppy limbs and stylized movement of a ventriloquist's dummy. That's fine for simple barrel-smashing or grabbing an enemy and throwing them off the map in a King-of-the-Hill showdown. But when you have to start flinging your controller around to access Sixaxis-powered special moves the style gives way to frustration. It's just not so simple to jerk the controller one direction while keeping accurate directions on the analog sticks and mashing any of the kick, punch, or jump buttons.

While you're sitting on a couch with a buddy, the $10 investment might elicit a few guffaws, a handful of rounds of marionette smacks, whacks, throws, and lightning bolts…and then you'll find some other option with greater long-term appeal. Rob Smith



Comet Crash

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** PELFAST

− What is it about the PSN that has brought about the resurgence of tower defense games? Not that I'm complaining. They're the perfect blend of strategy and reflex. The twist with *Comet Crash* is that, now, you fight back. You purchase defensive towers (turrets, pulsars, lasers) and offensive troops (scouts, tanks, thief units that nab enemy soldiers) side by side, using cash you collect by destroying random comets floating by. The gameplay is solid, with entertaining stages that lend themselves to different strategies, but you have to overcome the art style to enjoy them. And the art is, um, simplistic. For some, unforgivably so. But if you've graduated from *PixelJunk Monsters* and *Savage Moon, Comet Crash* offers a decent amount of tower defense fun with it's campaign, offline co-op, and offline competitive modes. Teresa Dun

×2
Bonus Points
1000
1:08

Astro Tripper

PRICE: $4.99 **DEVELOPER:** POMPOM GAMES

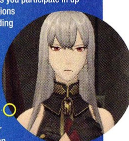
+ A pretty and well-designed top-down shooter for less than five bucks? Yes, please! Now, *Astro Tripper* isn't a dual-analog shooter. You can only shoot left and right (press X to fire, but not for too long or your weapon runs out of energy; tap Circle to flip horizontally) but you can move in any direction (Left-analog). Each of the 15 or so levels takes place on a shiny stage (shiny is good!) and has its own theme, like taking out cannons on a dreadnaught or fireball-spewing towers in a temple. The stages aren't flat—they tilt upwards and downwards, which you can use to your advantage during the few boss fights. *Astro Tripper* is beautiful. It's atmospheric. It's totally addictive, and the Trophies are a blast to pursue. Plus, it's cheap! Get it! Teresa Dun

PLAYSTATION STORE

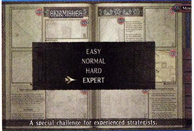
Valkyria Chronicles
Add-On Packs

One of the PS3's best RPGs extends its content with three add-on packs. They're $4.99 each. Which ones should you get?

▶MUST BUY!
BEHIND HER BLUE FLAME



You struggled bitterly against the Empire in the main campaign, but this add-on lets you play as the Empire. As you participate in up to four different missions (some unlock depending on how well you do), you discover that, hey, the Empire's soldiers are just normal guys (and funny, too). Except Selvaria. She's badass. And though this add-on gives her a slightly more human spin, it's worth twice the price of admission just for the thrill of leading her onto the battlefield.



A special challenge for experienced strategists.

▶TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT:
HARD EX MODE

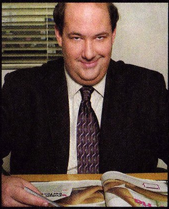
Play through the entire campaign again, except this time the enemies will be tougher and you won't be able to use Edelweiss, your tank. It might be worth it if you breezed through the game at least once already, but keep in mind: all you're getting with this add-on is a new difficulty mode.

▶PASS…
ENTER THE EDY DETACHMENT

A single mission that adds about two hours worth of gameplay—and only because you'll keep failing—Edy's Detachment is short, frustrating, and not worth the time. However, this add-on does spotlight some of the lesser-known characters (specifically, the male and female homosexual soldiers), so if a few snippets of character development are all you're after, go for it. But you've been warned.

PSN Video Delivery Service

Improve morale by downloading episodes of *The Office*—just not on company time



Deadpan humor. Awkward situations. A socially inept boss. *The Office* is a brilliant mockumentary that captures the nuances of life at a small Scranton, Pennsylvania office. A quirky cast breathes genius into the show, and to celebrate *The Office's* release on the PSN's Video Delivery Service, we talked with Brian Baumgartner, the talent behind the slack-jawed, impish, and sometimes crude Kevin Malone.

PTOM: Can you describe your character, Kevin Malone?
Brian Baumgartner: He's a child-like guy who prefers to live in the moment, which means he doesn't really remember anything that's happened before and doesn't care about the future. Everything he does it just about right now. It's fun to play a character that can be goofy and child-like and simple.

How do you think Kevin would describe *The Office* to someone who's never seen the show before?
Well, I don't think *he's* seen *The Office.*

You know what we mean...
It's tricky because we've actually talked about it: what would happen if these characters saw the show? There may come a time when that actually happens, when we do get a glimpse of how these characters respond after they see how they're portrayed.

Why do you think the show's gotten so popular?
It's a show that's doing something no one's really done before. Like making the camera a character. I think what makes the show so good is that we don't deal in stereotypes. We try to create real characters.

What is it that people connect to in the show?
I think it's the universality. Whether the situations are exaggerated or not, people respond to the characters because they know people like that, they've worked in offices. People spend, often, more time with the people that they're working with than the people at home, and they're forced to interact with these people. Shedding some comedy on that, I think people appreciate that.

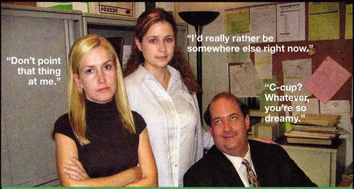
So, who's your favorite character?
Kevin Malone.

Okay... Who's your second favorite?
Darryl at the warehouse. He seems to know better than everybody else in the office the ridiculousness of Michael [the boss].

What's it like shooting an episode of *The Office*?
It's not as exciting as most people think! It takes us a week to get a half hour episode. My parents were around last week. They came by for a couple of hours, and we were working on one scene the whole time. They were shocked at how long it takes to put together! Our show is supposed to be a documentary and ultra-realistic. I think that acting like we're not acting is the challenge that we continue to face, even after a hundred episodes.

What's the funniest thing that's happened on set?
So many people ask us this! It feels lame, but we don't really prank each other. When we laugh, 99 times out of 100, it's because of what was written or how someone delivered a line. We're not...putting mice into each other's desk drawers—I'm trying to think of what pranks could even be! But that stuff just doesn't really happen.

How do you feel about the fact that *The Office* will be available on the PS3's Video Delivery Service?
It's awesome! Pretty cool. I like that.


"Don't point that thing at me."
"I'd really rather be somewhere else right now."
"C-cup? Whatever, you're so dreamy."

Brian Baumgartner talks Games

PTOM: So, we heard you're a gamer! What type of games do you like to play?
Brian Baumgartner: I don't know that I'm a gamer, but pretty much every day at lunch, John Krasinski and I play *Madden* football.

Do you win?
Of course!

Every day?
Of course! I'm not going to tell you any different.

Do you trash talk when you win?
Ummmm. [Jittery laughter.] When I win, which is always, I'm a gentleman, and very polite.

Are you lying?
[In a singsong voice.] I don't knoooow.

What other games do you play?
Well, Rainn Wilson plays with us, too, sometimes. We cycle through a bunch. We played *Fight Night* and *Tiger Woods. Call of Duty* is very popular around the studio, very popular with the writers and the editors. We don't really have enough time for that, but sometimes we'll sit down in an editor's chair and try to shoot somebody or something. I will not pretend to be skilled at that game.

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Xbashing, and *"Love...exciting and new..."*

1,307

Word count of the longest email we won't be running

469

Number of followers we currently have on Twitter

26

Average age of PTOM readers according to an independent survey

DELAYING THE INEVITABLE

I just want to say you guys do a great job on the magazine. In fact, I would like more of it. That's why, with E3 2009 approaching, I think an expanded issue with 120-130 pages devoted to all of the happenings of the event would be great. With the flood of information from E3, there would easily be room for extra news, previews, features, and rumors. Now I realize you guys do the writing and it would be a lot of extra work, but here's one subscriber who would really appreciate it.

Sandra, via email

But Sandra, if we do a 120-page issue, pretty soon people will start to expect every issue to be that long, and next year, the E3 issue will have to be even *longer!* And the magazine will just keep growing and growing, and pretty soon we'll have no choice but to enlist the help of evil journalist robots. Is that what you want, Sandra? A magazine run by evil robots? Because that's what'll happen.

Okay, so Bumblebee's not evil. But you just wait and see what happens if you keep working him so hard!

FAIR TRADE

From the day I got my first Atari, I've been a functional videogame addict (depending on who you ask). My beautiful girlfriend of the past three years has taken an interest in gaming through a masterful plot of couples bonding. Ahhh love! The problem is that most games seem to be too fast-paced and controller-challenging for her, causing her to get frustrated and turning what should be a fun couples night into a bit of a headache. I love her to death for trying and was hoping you could recommend some games that might be basic enough to get her started on the gaming path while being

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LITTLE BIG LOVE STORY

I would first like to say that you are partially responsible for this. Your feature on LittleBigPlaneteers helped motivate me to get off my LittleBigButt and contribute to the world of *LBP.* See, there's this girl I recently met who is amazing. She helped me get 100-percent of the items in *LBP,* she's quite a looker, and just about anything she does makes me feel like I've pressed the D-pad up three times! I wanted to show her how grateful I was for everything. Now, I'm not very good with words, so I thought my Sackboy friend could help me out. So with the power of my LittleBigImagination and a song by T. Double Turbo called "ithinki," I went to work. After a week's worth of setting up shots, scenes, and editing, I was left with this: http://tinyurl.com/d6vfr9. I wouldn't have been able to make anything like it without the help of the game. Without personally saying a word, I let her know how I feel. I hope you enjoy it, as I enjoyed every minute of making it. And if you are wondering, she just said she likes me too.

Steve Patyk, Maryland

That is an adorable LittleBig-Story, Steve. Cheesy and mildly embarrassing, but LittleBigAdorable nonetheless. It's just a good thing she LittleBigLikes you back or we would have LittleBig-Mocked you…or something. Calculators, Contra, and now crushes: is there anything *LittleBigPlanet* can't handle?

LittleBig-Wingman.

> **"I wouldn't have been able to make anything like it without the help of the game. Without personally saying a word, I let her know how I feel." >>**

entertaining enough not to put me to sleep.

Steven Lopes, via email

I have this girlfriend who always comes over to play my PS3 online. It's cool to have a girlfriend who likes videogames, but...SHE'S A GAME HOG. She's so addicted it's scary. She'll get mad if anyone tries to take her away from the game. *Resistance 2* was fun and convenient with its splitscreen online multiplayer, but it was so boring after a while. Now I bought *Killzone 2* and it's 10 times better than *Resistance,* but there's no splitscreen online! My girlfriend now hogs *Killzone.* It's driving me and everyone else insane. Why don't they make more splitscreen online games?! If they don't start doing so, I'll be forced to buy her a PS3 and that's too much of a dent in my bank account! I need to eat!

Dan, Niagara Falls, Canada

Alright, we've got the perfect solution to both of your problems: swap girlfriends. Right? Right?! Everyone's happy!

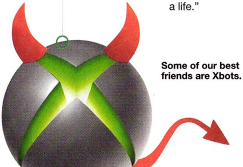
Admit it, Dan...the real reason you don't like your girl playing *Killzone 2* is that she's better at it than you.

TRASH TALK

I am becoming increasingly frustrated with the *Official PlayStation Magazine* because they bash and talk bad about Xbox and those that play it, referring to them as "xbots" in almost every issue. When I read comments like that it makes me so made because in the gaming community we should all enjoy all games, all systems and there is no need to talk bad about others. I am canceling my subscription to PlayStation mag because I cannot even read most articles due to the bashing (and the poor writing).

UpgradeCade, via email

Wow, those guys at *Official PlayStation Magazine* sound like real jerks. Glad we don't work *there.*



Some of our best friends are Xbots.

Stop the fanboy baiting. I am seriously annoyed by the constant insulting of other platforms that goes on in your magazine. All you are doing is fueling the fires of fanboy loathing, and, by proxy, slowly ruining the internet by encouraging the obsessed and annoying to post hateful, useless rants about how "ZOMG msater chef suxxors" or ironic comments like "xbots need to get a life."

On that note, stop using fanboy terms like "xbot." At best you're fueling the fanboy flames and at worst you're ruining your journalistic credibility. You should keep in mind that we should be gamers first.

Geoff, via email

Ok, seriously, where is all this coming from? Dear everyone sending us these emails, please produce evidence of our irrational and unending hatred for all things Xbox (excluding the occasional tongue-in-cheek reference to it as "that other system"). Thanks in advance.

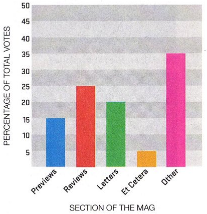
TWO OF A KIND

I subscribe to both Qore and PTOM. I enjoy both media formats and think they're well worth the subscription price for both. However, I have noticed that every issue of PTOM has a Qore code and was wondering: will you continue to have each Qore code for the month? Is there any downfall to not subscribing to Qore on its own? I just ask because I really enjoy the surprise free game downloads that accompany certain Qore episodes or the advance beta invites and would hate to lose that. Also, are there any plans to give PTOM subscribers a Qore subscription in full?

Joe Wilson, Pittsburg PA

Actually Joe, the June 09 issue was the last issue to offer a Qore code for the foreseeable future. And the Qore code in your PTOM subscription isn't for a complete episode, free

Your favorite parts of PTOM



Overheard this month in the PTOM offices:

"Nothing says 'happy birthday Jesus' like a trip to Vegas."

I LOST 65 POUNDS ON THE CoD DIET AND YOU CAN TOO!

coders don't get the downloads and extras that you mentioned unless they actually pay. It's only fair, really, since a bunch of people already paid for their Qore subscriptions. We can't just give the whole thing away for free!

PS3 FIT

I was very overweight six months ago, so one day, I decided to begin a healthier lifestyle: I ate better and I played videogames. How is this possible? You see, I have an elliptical exercise machine at home, and I now run for an hour-and-a-half on it while playing *Call of Duty 4* and other shooter games. Yes, you can maintain accuracy while jogging with a controller in your hand! I have enjoyed all types of games while exercising. I have now lost 65 pounds in six months, and it feels great knowing that I exercise everyday doing what I love to do. The time exercising goes by so fast when you're consumed in a game. Exercise does not have to be a pain. It can be rewarding.

Jose, via email

That…is…genius! But can you seriously run and play *CoD4* at the same time? That's like some kind of crazy stupid-human-trick, like patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time or being good at calculus. Either way, you're like PlayStation's version of Jared from the Subway ads. You need to hammer out a marketing deal ASAP!

"AD" HOMINEM

What's with the same GamesRadar Top 7 every time? Whenever I get the magazine, I open it up and check to see if you guys finally changed it but nope, "Bad guys you didn't want to kill." Every. Single. Time. Fix it.

Brodie, Canada

Um, you realize that's an advertisement, right? And that we don't really have any control over it? And that there's a website full of Top 7s if you want more? Question mark?

EVIL AVATAR

So why is it that we faithful, we dedicated, we band of brothers are not yet able to customize our own avatars for our PSN IDs? I don't think I need to point this out but I'm going to anyway because that's how I roll: the PS3 had sort of a slow rise up to where it is now. More features make people happy! Why doesn't Sony get this and let me customize my avatar? Come on, man! Everyone understands that customization is pure awesomeness! If Hannah Montana can sell her own brand of…well, EVERYTHING, then why can't I customize my avatar for complete strangers to gawk at when I'm playing *Call of Duty?*

Shane, Missouri

The Internet is full of creepy people, Shane. Creepy people with relative anonymity. Giving them the ability to create or customize their own avatars…well, there would probably be more than a few violations of Sony's Terms of Service agreement. That being said, it would be nice if we at least had more options. Why don't games come with avatars? Why can't users submit designs that Sony could then approve and distribute? Let's hope Sony gets the message soon.

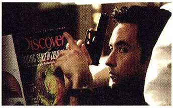
THE TROUBLE WITH TROPHIES

Climbing up spinning platforms higher and higher to finally reach my first Gold Bolt. I'm really enjoying this *Ratchet & Clank* game. I grab my shiny new bolt and…nothing. No "ding" or a little message in the top right corner of my screen showing off my new trophy. "Ok, it's fine," I tell myself. So I start up another level and then it happens. Top right corner, a little box pops up and…invite to play *Mercenaries 2*. Before I know it, I'm changing discs and playing *Mercs 2* to work on

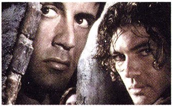
Right on the mark

"For the Ratings section in the May issue of PTOM, all of the pictured individuals are assassins:

Jean Reno as Leon in *Leon* (known in the U.S. as *The Professional)*



John Cusack as Martin Blank in *Grosse Pointe Blank*



Sylvester Stallone as Robert Rath in *Assassins*

All in honor of *Wanted: Weapons of Fate,* a videogame extending from a movie about assassins. Interestingly, all of the movies pictured are from the mid-'90s…"

Congratulations, Douglas Brod! You've correctly identified all of our deadly assassins and will be rewarded with stuff from Rob's desk. Well done!

contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. Because you never send presents anyway.

another Platinum Trophy. Then I realize that I just turned off one of the best games on the PS3 for a very average game just because of the Trophies. This isn't quality gaming. This is Gaming Hell. How did this happen to me? OH MY GOD…I'M A TROPHY WHORE!

Crossed23, via email

Think of it as a lesson in self-control, Crossed. Or just look on the bright side like Crane_god here:

First and foremost, I'll admit it: Yes, I am a Trophy whore. But for some reason, many of you out there see this as a curse. I would like to attempt to educate many readers about the wonders of Trophies. Not only do Trophies provide gamers with the chance to explore every inch of a game, but they also allow gamers to experience genres of games they might not normally play. Trophies can also enhance the story of a game and provide a depth that you may not experience otherwise. Take *BioShock,* for example. With a silver Trophy compelling you to find every audio diary, you appreciate and understand the story that much more. So I ask my fellow PlayStation brethren: Is being a Trophy whore really that bad?

Crane_god, via email

Now if only Home had some Trophies…

THE INTERNET FACTORY

Hey, I live in Puerto Rico in a part that are a lot of trees!! and Dam! The Internet is so Slow that when I start session in 4 minutes said that happend an error!! and it make me angry... the point is that why you people in the PTOM dont make some thing like AT&T?? 3G??? I will be awesome!! Then the PS3 will be call the Playstation 3-G! jaja, It will make me Proud!! So then I could play *Killzone 2* with out anything saying me that had been an error!!. Hey, hope you dont get angry but... Im going to ask you something... Why the Computers you got gave MICROSOFT?? You could create your own! I know that peace is good but competition is good!!!! Well Hope you at least make one of the three...

Jaime Rivera, via email

Be right back, guys, going to start a multi-national telecommunications/computer tech company real quick. We'll just be a minute…

LIGHTNING ROUND

Who on the PTOM staff has the most Trophies and what's the level?

Carlos, via email

We all have infinity Trophies forever. But Carlos has the most.

Has there ever been a *Metal Gear Solid* movie? And if not, why?

Suicide Silence, via email

What, 10 hours of cutscenes wasn't enough for you?

Is it wrong for me to worship my PlayStation 3? Is it NORMAL for me to pray to the Sony gods each and every night?

Johnny, via email

Oh, you don't have to pray to us. Letters work just fine. (See what we did there?)

Is there any possibility that there will be PSP Trophies?

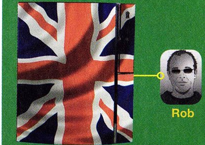
Nathanael Hardy, via email

Anything is possible, Nate! Except swallowing a spoonful of cinnamon. No one can do that.

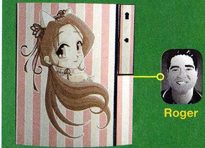
"I can't believe I didn't get cast in *G.I. JOE: The Rise of Cobra.* I was born to play that role!"

Decal Quiz Results!

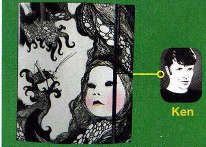
ALRIGHT CLASS, PENCILS DOWN! It's time for us to reveal the answers to the Decal Quiz from our May issue in which we asked you to match each custom-skinned PS3 with its editor/owner:



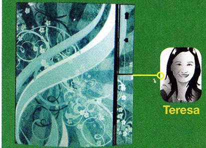
Rob



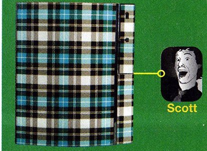
Roger



Ken



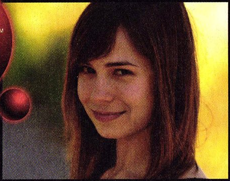
Teresa



Scott

We had quite a few entries to this contest, but believe it or not, we received just one correct answer. So congratulations to Luke Pietrzak who correctly identified each editor's console and will receive some PS3 decals of his very own!

Presented by the PlayStation Network



Qore host Veronica Belmont

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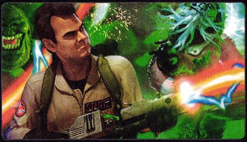


Ghostbusters: The Video Game

QORE EPISODE 12

Featuring Batman: Arkham Asylum, DiRT 2, Ghostbusters, and the technology of Euphoria

As the weather heats up at Qore HQ, we've got the latest word on some of the hottest games coming soon to the PlayStation 3.

Enter the Asylum
Arkham Asylum. It's the place where Batman's most psychotic foes are kept under lock and key…at least, until the Joker takes control. Developer Rocksteady Games takes us inside the Gotham City landmark to show us their upcoming game.

Take a Spin
Qore host Veronica Belmont visits Codemasters in the UK for an early look at the next iteration in its *DiRT* rally racing series…and a chance to try out their driving simulator.

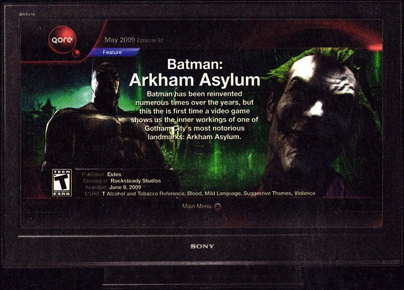
Busting Makes Us Feel Good
It may have been 20 years since the Ghostbusters last strapped on their proton packs, but the films have not been forgotten. Dan Aykroyd, who lends his voice and writing talents to the new video game, talks about the rebirth of the popular franchise.

Natural Motion
Complete a PhD at Oxford University or open a development studio specializing in super-intelligent, natural AI? NaturalMotion's CEO made his decision, and now he shows us the Euphoria tech his company developed to create extremely realistic characters.

Everyone who downloads Qore this month will receive an excusive *inFAMOUS* PS3 theme with a cool new twist (take another look after a few days).

Don't miss the "What's Hot" section for Qorespondent Audrey Cleo as she reveals some of the big-name Blu-ray movie releases that you can watch on your PS3.

Batman: Arkham Asylum



May 2009 Episode 12

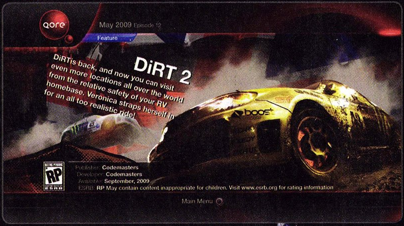
Feature

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Batman has been reinvented numerous times over the years, but this the is first time a video game shows us the inner workings of one of Gotham City's most notorious landmarks: Arkham Asylum.

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Rockstead Studios
Available: June 9, 2009
ESRB: T Alcohol and Tobacco Reference, Blood, Mild Language, Suggestive Themes, Violence

DiRT 2



May 2009 Episode 12

Feature

DiRT 2

DiRTis back, and now you can visit even more locations all over the world from the relative safety of your RV homebase. Veronica straps herself in for an all too realistic ride!

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Available: September, 2009
ESRB: RP May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information

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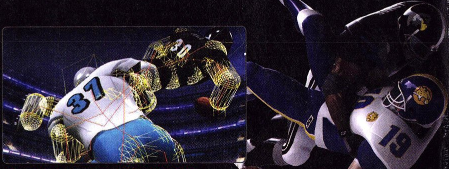
RATING PENDING
RP
boost
Main Menu



Euporia technology in *Backbreaker*

Photograph by Mark Madeo

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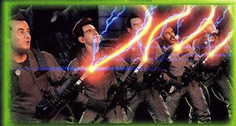

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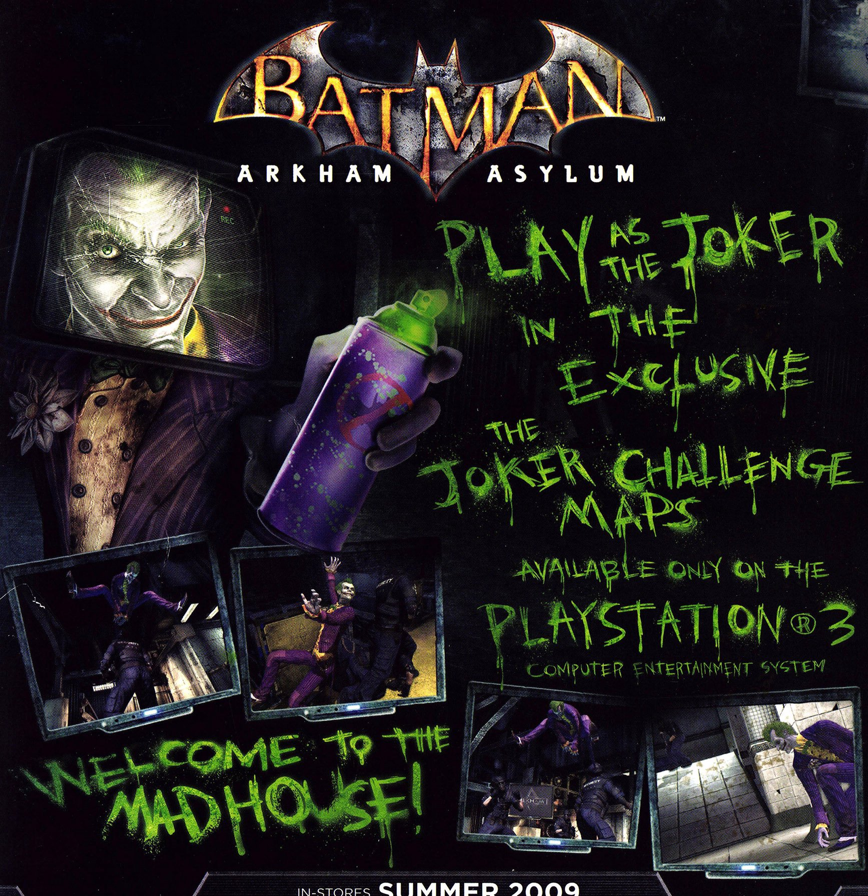
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